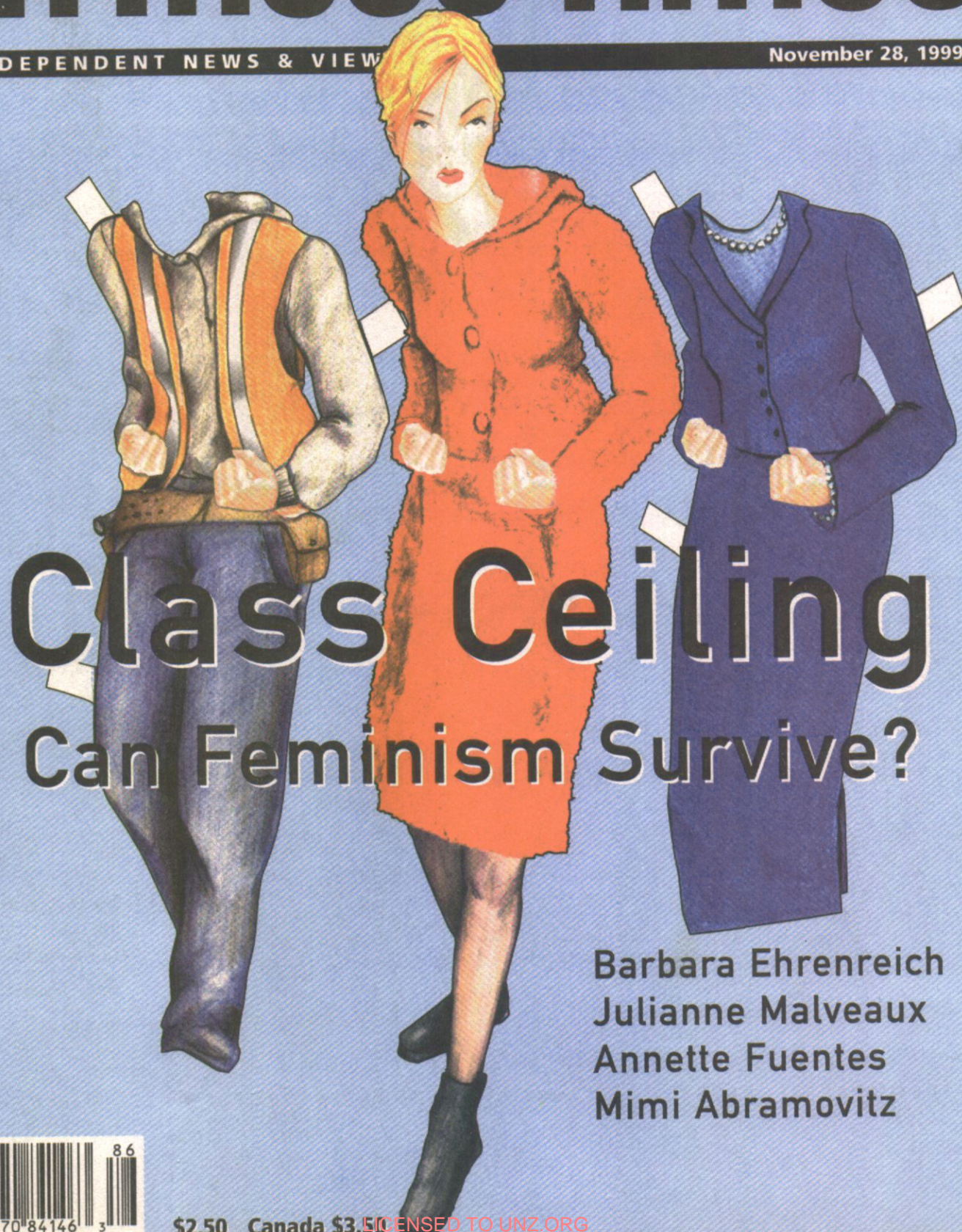


# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

November 28, 1999



## Class Ceiling Can Feminism Survive?

Barbara Ehrenreich  
Julianne Malveaux  
Annette Fuentes  
Mimi Abramovitz



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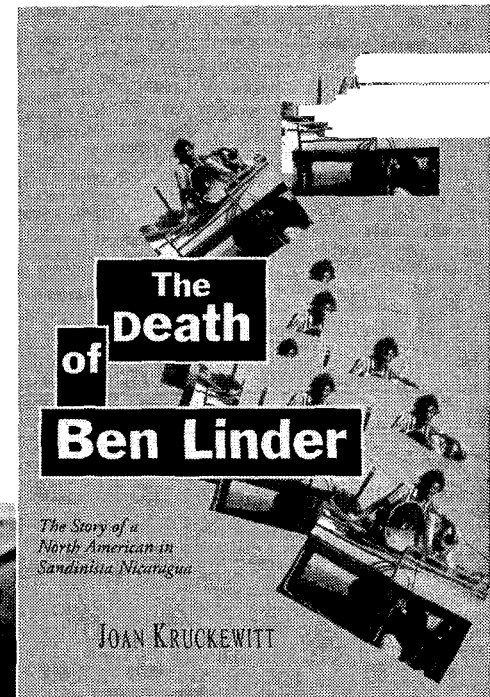


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*In These Times* (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 23, No. 26) went to press on Oct. 29, for newsstand sales Nov. 15 to Nov. 28, 1999.

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Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). Call (800) 827-0270.

All correspondence should be sent to: 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. E-mail: [itt@inthesetimes.com](mailto:itt@inthesetimes.com).

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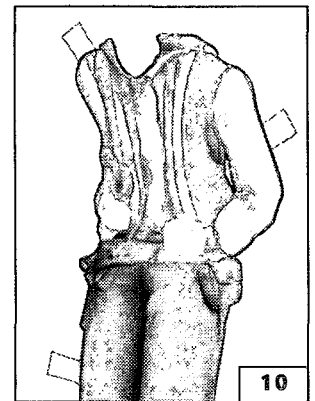
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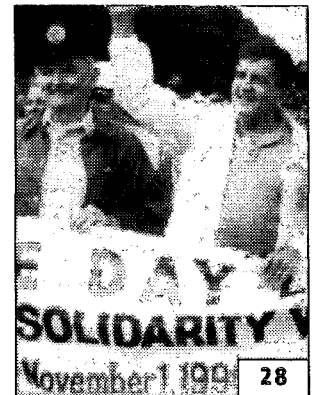
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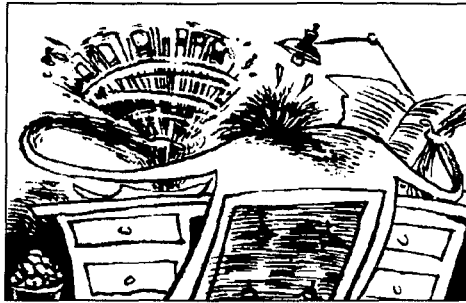
Cover by Elizabeth Mayer. Red bouclé suit by agnes b.

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# Letters

## Run Warren

I just read the Oct. 17 editorial by Joel Bleifuss urging Warren Beatty to run for president. I recently saw Beatty's speech to the Southern California Americans for Democratic Action on C-Span, and for the first time in a long time I actually felt excited about becoming involved in a campaign. He spoke about issues that actually matter to the people of the United States. It was quite exhilarating to hear someone talk about making this country better for its people, instead of the past 20 years of the "I feel your pain but I'm not going to do anything about it," post-Reagan Democratic Party. His position and passion on the issues won my mind. At the end of his speech, however, his invocation of the spirit of



Eleanor Roosevelt won my heart. I agree: Run, Warren, run.

**Robert O. Bucklew, Jr.**  
Cleveland, Ohio

## Ralph Ran

"We can overcome the power of big money to corrupt our political system and the government it elects," says Warren Beatty. "When was the last time you heard a presidential candidate say something like that?" asks Joel Bleifuss in his Oct. 17 editorial. The answer: in 1996, from Ralph Nader on the Green Party ticket, again and again.

**Ted Cloak**  
Co-Chairman  
Green Party of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, N.M.

## Side Slapping

That satire about trading in human lives by Dennis Hans was fantastic! It was a market-oriented update on Swift's "modest proposal" for eating Irish children ("Trading Races," Oct. 17). It was SO Republican! The one a few months ago about various political and economic approaches to lifeboats on

the Titanic was also fine. I hope *In These Times* will continue to keep the back page a place for leftist humor (a rare commodity).

**Rick Buck**  
Port Charlotte, Fla.

## Shot in the Dark

In his recent letter, Bob Cantor asserts that "firing shots at a building full of people" is a far more serious offense than any of Pacifica's actions in its attempted hostile takeover of community radio KPFA in Berkeley, Calif. However, no shots were fired by either side at a "building full of people." Granted, Philip Connors' original article certainly left that mistaken impression ("Mixed Signals," Sept. 5). But the fact is, whoever fired the infamous shots did so in the middle of the night at an empty Pacifica Foundation headquarters. This still unsolved incident became Pacifica's excuse to occupy a different building (not Pacifica headquarters, but the KPFA radio station next door) with armed security guards. And these armed goons later assaulted KPFA programmer Dennis Bernstein and supporter Karen Pickett in a campaign of physical intimidation.

**Christopher Dunnbier**  
Healdsburg, Calif.

## Welcome, Julie

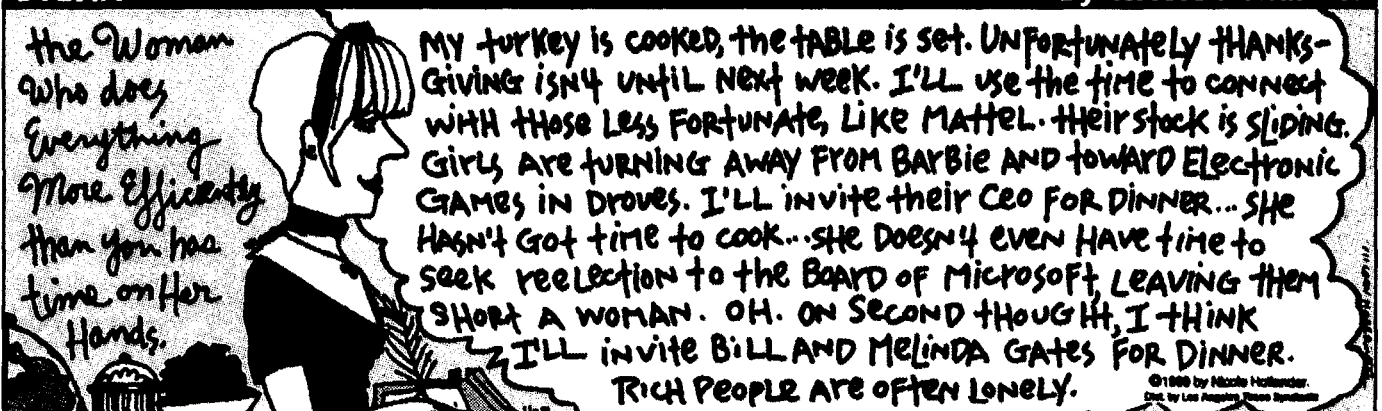
To our great delight, Julie Fain has joined our staff as assistant to the publisher. A Brown University graduate, Julie comes to us after a stint as business manager for the *International Socialist Review*, where she managed to juggle responsibility for circulation, finances and promotion. In recent months she has also worked as the national producer of *Marx in Soho*, Howard Zinn's touring play (which can be seen in Berkeley, Calif., on Nov. 12, in San Francisco on Nov. 13, and in Chicago on Dec. 9 to 11). We look forward to a long association with her.

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## SYLVIA

By Nicole Hollander





# Confronting Poverty

**T**he presidential candidates have recently put the issue of poverty back on the national agenda, and that is a very welcome change.

George W. Bush rebukes his fellow Republicans for "trying to balance the budget on the backs of the poor." But talk is cheap. Al Gore and Bill Bradley have both put forth similar plans—expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, devoting more resources to childcare and early education programs, and raising the minimum wage to \$6.15 per hour. Gore says holding deadbeat dads accountable is "one of the most important things we can do to reduce child poverty." While Bradley, who offers the more far-reaching proposal, is committed to "lifting" 7 million of the 13.5 million poor children "out of poverty" by 2008.

Why should we help "the poor"? One can say that helping the less fortunate is the moral thing to do, but ideals of Christian charity have a tendency to turn paternalistic. Or, one can make the case that "the poor" put a costly and unnecessary strain on the nation's social fabric that negatively impacts everyone's quality of life. While this is true, viewing poverty as a societal plague takes in only part of the picture. The argument that best holds water acknowledges that the majority of the "the poor" are poor not because they don't work, but because society has failed to create an economy that employs all people at a living wage. Consequently, we as a society are collectively responsible for people living in poverty.

So what's the solution? A good place to start would be to stop talking about the "the poor" and use the more accurate term "working class." After all, most poor people work, a fact Bradley acknowledges, observing that "very large numbers of children who live below the poverty line come from hardworking families with parents whose wages simply are not adequate to support them."

Raising the minimum wage to \$6.15 per hour is a step in the right direction. Adjusting for inflation, the current \$5.15 per hour rate is worth 19 percent less than it was in 1979. According to the Economic Policy Institute, if the minimum wage were raised to \$6.15 per hour, 11.8 million American workers would receive a pay increase. Fifty-eight percent of those receiving a raise would be women. (We are not talking teenage girls; three quarters of these women are 20 or older.) And 50 percent of those receiving a raise live in households with annual incomes under \$25,000 a year.

But does increasing the minimum wage by \$1 really address the problems of working people?

Increasing the minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour would translate into an annual wage of \$12,792, a figure well short of the government poverty level of \$16,600 for a

family of four, itself a woefully inadequate measure. To set things right, the Census Bureau has been considering a proposal to raise the poverty level for a family of four to \$19,500. Were this to happen, 17 percent of Americans would be officially defined as poor as opposed to the current 12.7 percent. These figures make a mockery of October's front-page headlines, which proclaimed that the booming new economy had lifted 1.1 million Americans out of poverty. In response to this news, President Clinton crowed, "Finally we have stemmed the tide of rising inequality and this new report documents the strong income growth among all groups of people."

Well, not quite. A recent analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that in 1999 the gap between the rich and the poor will be as great as anytime since the Great Depression. This year, the richest 2.7 million Americans (1 percent of the population) are expected to have as much after-tax income as the poorest 100 million (38 percent of the population).

While the booming economy has made the rich richer, their good fortune has been helped along by Congress, which since 1977 has rewritten the tax codes to benefit the wealthy. These changes in tax policy will provide the richest 1 percent of households with an average tax cut of \$40,000 this year. This trend will accelerate next year, when Congress' new tax cuts go

**Congress, as an agent of vested interests, is hellbent on transforming our democracy into a plutocracy.**

into effect. According to the Treasury Department, the richest 20 percent of households will reap 78.5 percent of the tax cuts and the poorest 60 percent will receive 7.5 percent of the tax cuts. These statistics demonstrate two things. First, Congress, as an agent of wealthy special interests, is hellbent on transforming our democracy into a plutocracy. Second, Congress has the power to make policy that redistributes income.

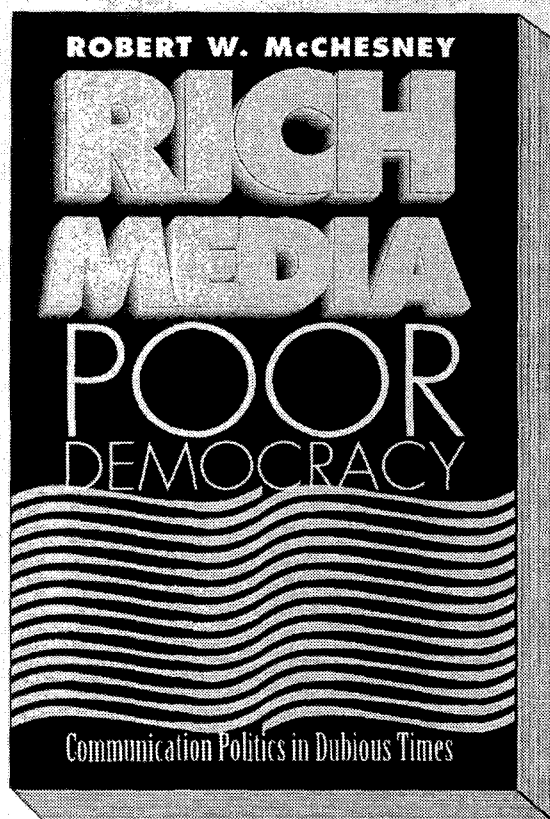
If it wanted to, Congress could up the minimum wage to a living wage of \$9.37 per hour. This 82 percent increase would be enough to raise the income of a single parent with three children to \$19,500, the new poverty level currently under consideration. Sure, that would put inflationary pressures on the economy, but those could be balanced by a sharp increase in the tax rate for those 5 percent of families with incomes of more than \$145,000.

Maybe that sounds silly. But so does applauding a modest proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$6.15 as an adequate solution to the problem of working-class poverty.

Joel Bleifuss



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# Czech Wall of Shame

By Tony Wesolowsky

PRAGUE

**M**ore than a year ago, ethnic Czechs living in the northern Bohemian town Usti nad Labem petitioned city officials to do something about the Roma, or Gypsies, living in two tenements on their street. The Czechs complained that the buildings housing 39 Roma families on Maticni Street were a constant source of noise and filth. The mayor decided the only way to mend relations between the feuding neighbors was to build a wall between them. In the early hours of Oct. 4, construction workers, escorted by police, came to carry out the controversial task.

Critics of the plan, including Human Rights Watch, say the wall smacks of racism and symbolizes the further marginalization of the Roma, who already face state-sponsored discrimination and racially motivated violence in the Czech Republic.

The wall could set a dangerous precedent. At least one other Czech town—the Moravian city of Vsetin—is debating a similar proposal, and last year an even more drastic plan was drawn up in Plzen, where Roma would have been forcibly moved to portable cabins on the city outskirts with around-the-clock police supervision. That plan was scuttled.

More than 5 million Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe, 300,000 of them in the Czech Republic. Originally from northeastern India, they began a slow westward migration about 1,000 years ago. Historically, the Roma have been Europe's most disadvantaged ethnic group. During the Holocaust, half a million Roma were killed. Under Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, the Roma were forced to end their nomadic way of life. Police killed all Roma caravan horses and removed the wheels from their wagons. Many were settled in dreary industrial towns in the western fringes of the country. Emptied of Germans who were accused of supporting the Nazis, the towns faced labor shortages, which the Roma filled. Usti nad Labem was one such place.

Recently, Roma have been hit hard by the Czech economic downturn. In some towns, Roma unemployment is as high as 99 percent. Like most of the industrial north, economic prospects in Usti nad Labem are especially bleak. Most factories have either closed or drastically

complained to authorities of Roma loitering on the street at all hours, yelling or drunk. Mayor Ladislav Hruska says opting for the wall was not an easy decision. "This was not an ideal solution for me either," he says. "But what is going on there is a tragedy. It is a tragedy for those people, including Roma, who want to live normally." Hruska notes that the city downsized the original proposal for a 13-foot-high concrete wall to one 6 feet high and that a new playground was built for the Roma children.



DAVID BRAUCHLIN/NEWSMAKERS

Roma at the wall on Maticni Street.

scaled back production. Across the Czech Republic, the grim economic outlook has fed the rise of neo-Nazi groups that target the Roma as scapegoats.

Caught in a perpetual web of poverty, many Roma live on the dole or work in low-paying jobs. Unable to speak Czech fluently, 70 percent of Roma children are sent to schools for retarded children.

Many Roma have packed their bags and left the Czech Republic for the West. This year alone, some 2,000 Czech Roma have fled to Britain seeking political asylum. The influx of refugees has strained bilateral relations, with London threatening to introduce visa requirements for Czechs.

Problems on Usti nad Labem's Maticni Street date back to 1992, when local authorities herded Roma families unable to pay rent elsewhere into two tenements. Ethnic Czechs living nearby have

As workers arrived to begin construction, Roma families on Maticni flooded the street and lay down to form a human blockade. Police moved in to remove them. Many Roma say they were manhandled by the police and have filed lawsuits against the city. With construction dragging on for days, Maticni Street became the focal point for Roma protests against Czech racial intolerance, attracting the attention of the media across Europe. Roma say they will now picket city halls across the Czech Republic. Recently, a group of Roma met with Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) and other U.S. officials to urge Washington to pressure Prague on their behalf.

The Usti nad Labem incident has cast a pall over the Czech Republic, which has been hailed for its seemingly smooth transition from Communism to a market-based economy. Czech officials are



most wary of the criticism from the European Union, which, like other former Communist countries, they are desperate to join. The wall went up the same day the European Union published a report on Eastern European hopefuls, which showed the Czech Republic slipping behind other front-runners to join the bloc. European Commission president Romano Prodi condemns the situation in Usti nad Labem outright, evoking images of the Berlin Wall. "Europe will never accept new walls separating European citizens from one another," he says.

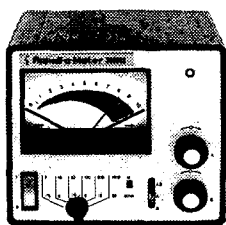
But many Czechs resent what they consider Europe's hypocritical finger-wagging. They say the same Western countries lecturing them on how to treat

the Roma have a less than exemplary record on race relations. In Britain, there have been public calls to deport the recent wave of Czech Roma immigrants. The Czech weekly *Respekt* recently reported that CSA, the Czech national airline, has been engaging in racial profiling, noting with a "G" any passengers resembling Roma and then passing the lists on to British immigration officials. In October, Slovakian Roma in Belgium were sent back home after officials turned down their requests for asylum.

Czech President Vaclav Havel has been one of the more vocal government critics of the wall, but others in the Social Democrat-led government have been less forthcoming. Leading Czech powerbroker and former Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus

casts the issue as merely a squabble between a local authority and the central government to settle a "terribly complex social problem."

This lack of urgency in Prague reflects Czech society's refusal to acknowledge its own racism. Markus Pape, spokesman for the European Roma Rights Center, says the Czech government has dragged its feet over the issue for more than a year, first by denying the wall amounted to segregation and then arguing that, as a democracy, the Czech federal government was powerless to demand that Usti nad Labem rescind its decision. "If the wall was one isolated incident no one would care," Pape says. "Unfortunately, it isn't." ■



# Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

## Spook.com 8.3

After years spent watching Silicon Valley capitalists make instant millions (and produce an astonishing variety of cool and/or useless gadgets in the process), the Central Intelligence Agency has decided to get in on the action—forming a nonprofit venture capital firm to invest in tech startups that might be able to develop James Bond-worthy technology to help the CIA with whatever it's supposed to be doing these days.

The agency has hired a former toy company executive to do it: 39-year-old Gilman Louie, formerly of Hasbro. Some might worry that a government agency with the CIA's, ah, reputation might have trouble gaining the confidence of Silicon Valley natives, but Louie says he's sure the \$28 million in taxpayer money he has spread around will open a lot of doors. "There's a psychological barrier people have to overcome," Louie admitted in a recent interview with the *San Jose Mercury News*. "But the valley is practical. If they can get

equity appreciation by working with the CIA, it doesn't bother them."

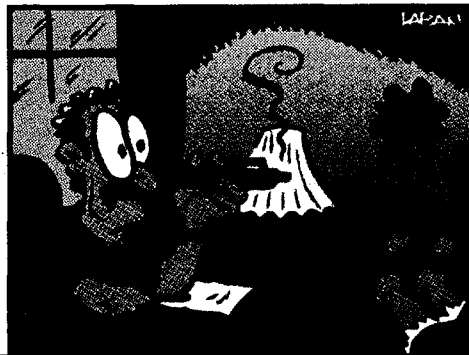
## Licensed to Kill 8.6

But James Bond-style gadgets aren't always a good thing to have around the house—as one Argentine man recently learned. Playing with what he thought was a pen, but which was actually a disguised gun, the 29-year-old man inadvertently shot and killed his mother. According to Reuters, relying on local reports, the man "was sitting in the kitchen of his Buenos Aires home trying to work out why the weapon would not write when it went off." Oops.

## Breaking the Chains 3.2

A rare bit of good news here in Appalloland: Alabama's revival of the chain gang as a regular part of prison life—the topic of at least one *Appall-o-Meter* item in recent years—has finally come to an end after four less than glorious years. What's appalling is the *reason* it came to an end: not because prison officials or

politicians recognized it for the retrograde travesty it was, or even as the result of a lawsuit or court decision—but because they couldn't spare the guards. Alabama Department of Corrections spokesman Tom Gilkeson told The Associated Press that his department didn't even have enough guards to properly watch those inside prison walls, much less those put on parade outside of them. "We didn't have enough people for it," Gilkeson explained. However, (un-chained) gangs of minimum security prisoners will continue to put in time on work details outside.



TERRY LABAN



# A Morally Bankrupt Act

By Kristin Kolb

Congress, sitting on a comfy pillow of big money, is continuing to "reform" us back into the Dark Ages. As welfare "reform" cleansed public assistance programs, now bankruptcy "reform" threatens to make it even harder for those unduly burdened by debt and bad luck—single moms kicked off welfare, those without health insurance suddenly struck with a major illness, workers downsized out of their jobs and struggling to find a new career—to wipe the slate clean and start over.

Scheduled to hit the Senate floor any day now, the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1999 has a strong chance of passing. It breezed through the House in May by a veto-proof 313 to 108 margin. The Senate version—sponsored by Iowa Republican Charles Grassley—would make filing for bankruptcy more difficult and change repayment priorities for "non-dischargeable debt," which cannot be cancelled during bankruptcy. Currently that category includes federal debt, such as student loans and taxes, as well as child support and alimony. The new law would add to that group any credit card charges made 90 days prior to filing for bankruptcy. So people who must resort to cash advances to make it to the next paycheck—or plastic to pay for groceries or their child's school tuition—will continue to owe at the same high interest rates that drained them dry.

Bankruptcy reform would be especially damaging to women. Economic equality for women is still lagging. Currently, the average annual earnings for a man working full-time are \$42,077. For women, it dips way down to \$28,363—that's nearly 30 percent less. Compound living expenses with student loans, and the average woman may be tempted to rely on credit cards to get by. The Census Bureau recently reported that a third of

women who head their own households have trouble paying for rent and utilities—it's only half that for men. A recent study by Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Warren found that women are filing for personal bankruptcy more than men and married couples. After surveying 8 of the 94 bankruptcy districts, Warren concluded that women accounted for 39 percent of bankruptcy filings over the past year, compared to 28 percent for men and 33 percent for married couples.

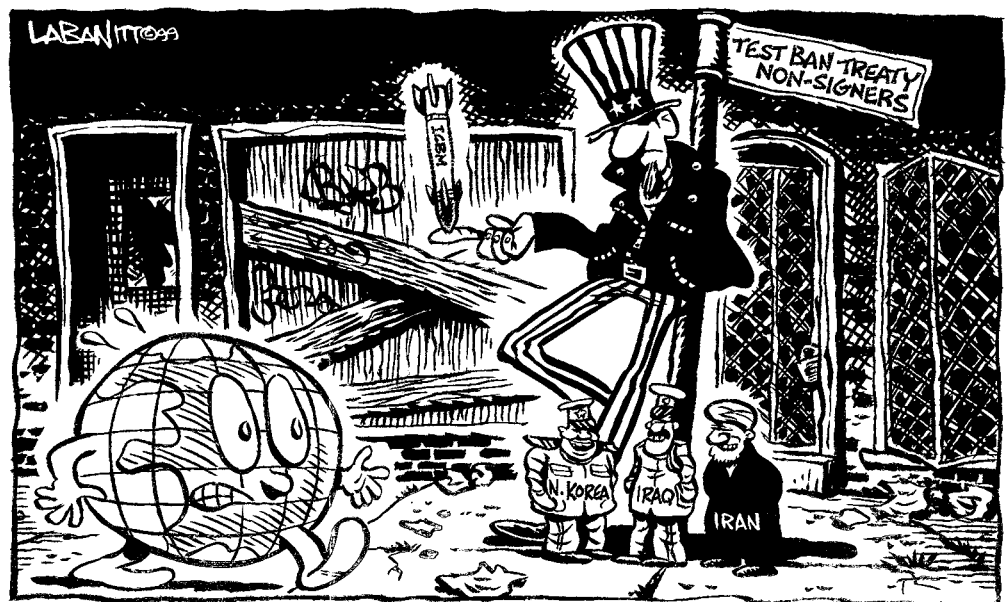
Bankruptcy reform also would put most women emerging from divorce in dire straits. According to Warren's study, women—who usually gain custody of their children—see a 30 percent decline in their standard of living following divorce. Men's standard of living, however, generally remains stable. Without the economic support a marriage provides, women often must live off their credit cards as they search for higher-paying or full-time jobs. Even when child support is paid on time, it hardly covers the costs of raising children—expensive childcare, toys and clothes, allowances, school activities and so on.

The new law would give credit card debt the same priority as family responsibilities—even higher, when you consider the aggressive collection tactics of the wealthy and resourceful credit companies. Delinquent fathers in Chapter 7 would have even less of a reason to send money to their kids than they do now. In 1997, as many as 325,000 bankruptcy cases included child support and alimony orders. Half of those cases involved people trying to collect child support and alimony from their ex. According to the National Organization for Women, under the proposed law many divorced women with children would wait five years or more to receive all their past due child support.

In anticipation of the \$4 billion they could make off the legislation, credit card and banking industry lobbies have spent more than \$61 million filling the campaign coffers of congressional leaders to the brim. The top recipient this year is Delaware Democrat Joseph Biden, raking in \$57,075. The lobbying firm headed by former Republican National Committee chair Haley Barbour, a buddy of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, earned \$1.34 million lobbying from creditors.

Instead of delivering another blow to women and the poor, reforming the finances of a morally bankrupt Congress should be the real issue. ■

Terry LaBan



THE COMPANY WE KEEP



# March of the Other America

**T**he FDR memorial in Washington is a solemn place. Its marble walls are covered with the New Deal president's pledges to end hunger, homelessness and poverty in America. "It's 60 years later and we still know all those words in the October sunlight. Joan is a former fish cannery worker who was fired during her pregnancy. She ended up on welfare. Two years ago her benefits were cut.

Joan is literally surrounded by the hungry, homeless and poor. About 200 people (predominantly women and children with some men) stopped by the memorial on Oct. 1—their first step on a month-long trek to the United Nations in New York.

The March of the Americas, organized by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU)—an anti-poverty outfit based in the poorest part of Philadelphia—drew walkers from a dozen states as well as some Canadian welfare activists, farmworkers and a delegation of landless peasants from Bolivia and Brazil. Their message: The U.S. government's denial of social welfare is a violation of people's human and economic rights. At the Inter-Americas Commission of the Organization of American States, they filed a petition charging the United States with violating international law.

"We intend to see economic injustice ended," KWRU organizer Cheri Honkala explains. "We wouldn't even be here if we didn't believe it could be done."

I was skeptical about another draining, low-impact protest. And sure enough, despite the great visuals—poor moms with toddlers camping each night by the road and trudging the 400 chilly autumn miles to New York—two weeks into the protest, the media have given them exactly one two-paragraph story, a single wire report, a handful of pictures and a couple of spots on local news (on the days Danny Glover and Jackson Browne stopped by).

My fears were stoked by what observers said. Sergio Thomas, a clean-cut guy

built for football who watched the march in Washington, shrugs: "I guess it brings us awareness of what's happening in other than our own world."

Attention from the press could erode those borders, boost fundraising, elevate the issue and generate support. Some find



it charming that I am still that naive.

The fact is, when it comes to attracting media, the marchers are doing it all wrong. Asked why she was walking, Erica Morrison, a homeless mother and manager of one of KWRU's emergency housing centers in Philadelphia, rattles off parts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Article 23 states we're entitled to a job at a living wage. Article 25 says we have rights to clothing, housing medical care and social services. Article 26 is about the right to an education."

The poor who make it into the news are hopeless and dependent: people like Robin Edwards, a 38-year-old mother of six who was recently described in the *New York Times* as: "A painfully shy woman who stares at the ground when she talks, she reads at the third grade level and is unclear about such basics as what year her [welfare] deadline expires." On *60 Minutes*, Lesley Stahl talked to Victor Barriera, a welfare worker's "difficult case," who was reluctant to take a job that would require him to cut his hair. The *St. Petersburg Times* featured Evelyn Bibbins: "Bibbins has little formal education and no marketable skills. She has no husband to offer emotional or financial backing."

In the media's welfare stories, professional "experts" do the thinking for the

"hard to help" inert poor. Heroic tales of folks who "make it off welfare" are fine, but the standard scenario only embraces bootstrap pullers who act alone.

The KWRU story is way too collective: The group's effectiveness in Philadelphia stems from their skill at pestering social workers, heckling housing officials and training applicants for welfare. This summer, KWRU members occupied an empty building until the housing authority came up with a handful of homes.

As for soundbites, they don't talk the right talk. The media convention is to discuss "welfare" not "poverty." These folks aren't with that program. "We're not interested in eliminating welfare; we're interested in eliminating poverty," says Mary Bricker-Jenkins, a KWRU supporter who is also a social worker. "Moving folks from poverty level assistance to poverty wages isn't progress."

Long ago, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, in *Poor People's Movements*, drew a distinction between

**The media convention is to discuss "welfare" not "poverty." These folks aren't with that program.**

groups that attempt to organize mass-membership movements to acquire political influence, and others that disrupt the system by demanding relief—a more defiant mode.

The marchers heading to New York are continuing the second tradition. They aren't petitioning the big human rights groups, politicians or the press. What they are doing, as they weather the rain this month, is bringing an international lawsuit, mobilizing themselves and strengthening their defiance. They're also invading media-insulated worlds. As one marcher puts it, "We want to make visible the power that's not in the White House, it's on your street."

Then again, maybe media attention is not the point. ■



# Burying the Facts

**E**ver since the Columbine High School shooting in April, Congress has been under increasing pressure to do something about gun control and youth violence. The Senate and the House passed separate versions of a new juvenile crime bill in the spring, and Republican leaders of both houses are nearing agreement on a compromise version. So far, all the media attention has focused on competing gun-control provisions contained in the two bills. The Senate's version is supposedly tougher, though not by much.

But hardly anyone is listening to a national coalition of children and youth organizations that claims the nation's youth are being sacrificed to the politics of scapegoating. Provisions in both bills will be disastrous for juveniles, the coalition claims, and the Senate's version will allow the criminal justice system to step up the targeting of young blacks in disproportionate numbers. "Everyone's forgotten about the juvenile part of the juvenile justice bill," says Vincent Schiraldi, executive director of the Washington-based Justice Policy Institute, which has joined with the Children's Defense Fund, the Child Welfare League of America, the American Bar Association's Juvenile Justice Committee, Girls Inc. and a half dozen other groups to create the ad hoc group.

Everyone knows that juveniles locked up with adults become easy targets for beatings, rapes and other forms of abuse from adult inmates. But an amendment in the House bill would do away with dozens of court consent decrees that have forced state prison systems to segregate juveniles from adult prisoners and have offered youths greater protections from abusive treatment by guards. In addition, both bills would allow federal prosecutors to try youths as young as 13 as adults, increase mandatory sentences and do away with confidentiality provisions in juvenile courts.

The Senate bill would even remove a provision in current law that requires states to track the racial and minority

composition of those in the juvenile justice system and to address any disproportionate confinement that is discovered. Sens. Orrin Hatch of Utah and Jeff Sessions of Alabama gutted that requirement, labeling it a quota system and unconstitutional. In an amazing



speech on the Senate floor this spring, Hatch, the powerful chairman of the Judiciary Committee, insisted there is no discrimination in our justice system: "The fact that 13 percent of the offenders are African-American and 67 percent of those incarcerated are, I don't see any information here saying that higher percentage was unjustifiably put in jail," Hatch said. "Does that mean there are a lot of white people getting off? I don't see any evidence of that. Statistics are statistics, but when people go to jail, it is generally because they have committed a crime."

Inconvenient statistics on incarceration seem to infuriate Hatch and Sessions, so they want to eliminate them. Such inconveniences include the fact that one of every three young black men in America today is in prison, in jail, on probation or on parole, a statistic so overwhelming it defies rational explanation. In his powerful new book, *Race to Incarcerate*, Marc Mauer of the Sentencing Project reveals that in 1995, according to the federal government's own studies, African-Americans made up 13 percent of the population and 15 percent of all drug users, yet they comprised 33 percent of people arrested, 55 percent of those convicted and 74 percent of those sentenced to prison for drug possession.

Simply put, young whites who use illegal drugs in the suburbs, on college campuses or in downtown nightclubs never get targeted by massive narcotics sweeps the way blacks and Latinos in the inner city do. So the jails fill up with young blacks and Latinos and nobody questions why.

It's the same with violent crime. "Suddenly, we have all these shootings by white kids in rural communities attacking other white kids," Schiraldi says. "So what does the Senate say? Let's abolish [measures to reduce] minority disparate sentencing. ... How do you figure that?" There has been a 37 percent drop in violent crime by juveniles since 1993, and a 43 percent drop in juvenile homicides, Schiraldi points out, but most of the nation believes the opposite: that youth violence is escalating, spilling out of the inner city and threatening every rural and suburban community in the country.

We can thank television for that, Schiraldi claims. Between 1993 and

## The jails fill up with young blacks and Latinos and nobody questions why.

1996, overall homicides in the United States declined by 20 percent and homicides by juveniles dropped by nearly 15 percent—the latter dropped even more sharply during the past few years. But television news has provided just the opposite image for the American public. According to a study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, during that same 1993 to 1996 period, coverage of homicide on the evening news by the major television networks skyrocketed by 721 percent. But murder sells. And locking up black kids wins votes for politicians.

No wonder our law-and-order Senate wants to use public anguish over tragedies like Columbine to lock up the inconvenient facts of what our government is doing to the nation's black and Latino youth. ■

# Doing it for Ourselves

## Can feminism survive class polarization?

By Barbara Ehrenreich

**H**ere's a scene from feminist ancient history: It's 1972 and about 20 of us are gathered in somebody's living room for our weekly "women's support group" meeting. We're all associated, in one way or another, with a small public college catering mostly to "nontraditional" students, meaning those who are older, poorer and more likely to be black or Latina than typical college students in this suburban area. Almost every level of the college hierarchy is represented—students of all ages, clerical workers, junior faculty members and even one or two full professors. There are acknowledged differences among us—race and sexual preference, for example—which we examine eagerly and a little anxiously. But we are comfortable together, and excited to have a chance to discuss everything from the administration's sexist policies to our personal struggles with husbands and lovers. Whatever may divide us, we are all women, and we understand this to be one of the great defining qualities of our lives and politics.

Could a group so diverse happily convene today? Please let me know if you can offer a present day parallel, but I tend to suspect the answer is "very seldom" or "not at all." Perhaps the biggest social and economic trend of the past three decades has been class polarization—the expanding inequality in income and wealth. As United for a Fair Economy's excellent book, *Shifting Fortunes: The Perils of the Growing American Wealth Gap*, points out, the most glaring polarization has occurred between those at the very top of the income distribution—the upper 1 to 5 percent—and those who occupy the bottom 30 to 40 percent. Less striking, but more ominous for the future of feminism, is the growing gap between those in the top 40 percent and those in the bottom 40. One chart in *Shifting Fortunes* shows that the net worth of households in the bottom 40 percent declined by nearly 80 percent between 1983 and 1995. Except for the top 1 percent, the top 40 percent lost ground too—but much less. Today's college teacher, if she is not an adjunct, occupies that relatively lucky top 40 group, while today's clerical worker is in the rapidly sinking bottom 40. Could they still gather comfortably in each other's living rooms to discuss common issues? Do they still have common issues to discuss?

**N**umbers hardly begin to tell the story. The '80s brought sharp changes in lifestyle and consumption habits between the lower 40 percent—which is roughly what we call the "working class"—and the upper 20 to 30, which is populated by professors, administrators, executives, doctors, lawyers and other "professionals." "Mass markets" became "segmented markets," with different consumer trends signaling differences in status. In 1972, a junior faculty member's living room looked much like that of a departmental secretary—only, in most cases, messier. Today, the secretary is likely to accessorize her home at Kmart; the professor at Pottery Barn. Three decades ago, we all enjoyed sugary, refined-flour treats at our meetings (not to mention Maxwell House coffee and cigarettes!) Today, the upper-middle class grinds its own beans, insists on whole grain, organic snacks, and vehemently eschews hot dogs and meatloaf. In the '70s, conspicuous, or even just overly enthusiastic, consumption was considered gauche—and not only by leftists and feminists. Today, professors, including quite liberal ones, are likely to have made a deep emotional investment in their houses, their furniture and their pewter ware. It shows how tasteful they are, meaning—when we cut through the garbage about aesthetics—how distinct they are from the "lower" classes.

In the case of women, there is an additional factor compounding the division wrought by class polarization: In the '60s, only about 30 percent of American women worked outside their homes; today, the proportion is reversed, with more than 70 percent of women in the work force. This represents a great advance, since women who earn their own way are of course more able to avoid male domination in their personal lives. But women's influx into the work force also means that fewer and fewer women share the common occupational expe-





science once defined by the word "housewife." I don't want to exaggerate this commonality as it existed in the '60s and '70s; obviously the stay-at-home wife of an executive led a very different life from that of the stay-at-home wife of a blue-collar man. But they did perform similar daily tasks—housecleaning, childcare, shopping, cooking. Today, in contrast, the majority of women fan out every morning to face vastly different work experiences, from manual labor to positions of power. Like men, women are now spread throughout the occupational hierarchy (though not at the very top), where they encounter each other daily as unequals—bosses vs. clerical workers, givers of orders vs. those who are ordered around, etc.

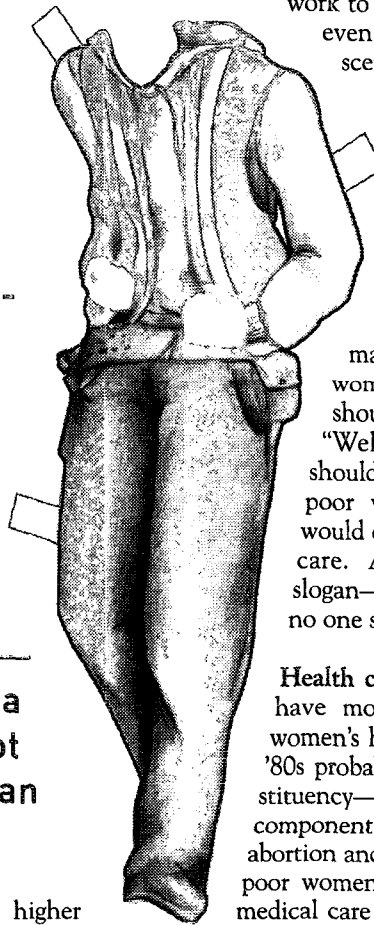
Class was always an issue. Even before polarization set in, some of us lived on the statistical hilltops, others deep in the valleys. But today we are distributed on what looks less like a mountain range and more like a cliff-face. Gender, race and sexual preference still define compelling commonalities, but the sense of a shared condition necessarily weakens as we separate into frequent-flying female executives on the one hand and airport cleaning women on the other. Can feminism or, for that matter, any cross-class social movement, survive as class polarization spreads Americans further and further apart?

For all the ardent egalitarianism of the early movement, feminism had the unforeseen consequence of heightening the class differences between women. It was educated, middle-class women who most successfully used feminist ideology and solidarity to advance themselves professionally. Feminism has played a role in working-class women's struggles too—for example, in the union organizing drives of university clerical workers—but probably its greatest single economic effect was to open up the formerly male-dominated professions to women. Between the '70s and the '90s, the percentage of female students in business, medical and law schools shot up from less than 10 percent to more than 40 percent.

There have been, however, no comparable gains for young women who cannot afford higher degrees, and most of these women remain in the same low-paid occupations that have been "women's work" for decades. All in all, feminism has had little impact on the status or pay of traditional female occupations like clerical, retail, health care and light assembly line work. While middle-class women gained MBAs, working-class women won the right not to be called "honey"—and not a whole lot more than that.

Secondly, since people tend to marry within their own class, the gains made by women in the professions added to the growing economic gap between the working class and the professional-managerial class. Working-class families gained too, as wives went to work. But, as I argued in *Fear of Falling*:

**While middle-class women gained MBAs, working-class women won the right not to be called "honey"—and not a whole lot more than that.**



*The Inner Life of the Middle Class*, the most striking gains have accrued to couples consisting of two well-paid professionals or managers. The doctor/lawyer household zoomed well ahead of the truck driver/typist combination.

So how well has feminism managed to maintain its stance as the ground shifts beneath its feet? Here are some brief observations of the impact of class polarization on a few issues once central to the feminist project:

**Welfare.** This has to be the most tragic case. In the '70s, feminists hewed to the slogan, "Every woman is just one man away from welfare." This was an exaggeration of course; even then, there were plenty of self-supporting and independently wealthy women. But it was true enough to resonate with the large numbers of women who worked outside their homes part time or not at all. We recognized our commonality as homemakers and mothers and we considered this kind of work to be important enough to be paid for—even when there was no husband on the scene. Welfare, in other words, was potentially every woman's concern.

Flash forward to 1996, when Clinton signed the odious Republican welfare reform bill, and you find only the weakest and most tokenistic protests from groups bearing the label "feminist." The core problem, as those of us who were pro-welfare advocates found, was that many middle- and upper-middle class women could no longer see why a woman should be subsidized to raise her children. "Well, I work and raise my kids—why shouldn't they?" was a common response, as if poor women could command wages that would enable them to purchase reliable childcare. As for that other classic feminist slogan—"every mother is a working mother"—no one seems to remember it anymore.

**Health care.** Our bodies, after all, are what we have most in common as women, and the women's health movement of the '70s and early '80s probably brought together as diverse a constituency—at least in terms of class—as any other component of feminism. We worked to legalize abortion and to stop the involuntary sterilization of poor women of color, to challenge the sexism of medical care faced by all women consumers and to expand low-income women's access to care.

In many ways, we were successful: Abortion is legal, if not always accessible; the kinds of health information once available only in underground publications like the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves* can now be found in *Mademoiselle*; the medical profession is no longer an all-male bastion of patriarchy. We were not so successful, however, in increasing low-income women's access to health care—in fact, the number of the uninsured is far larger than it used to be, and poor women still get second-class health care when they get any at all. Yet the only women's health issue that seems to generate any kind of broad, cross-

class participation today is breast cancer, at least if wearing a pink ribbon counts as "participation."

Even the nature of medical care is increasingly different for women of different classes. While lower-income women worry about paying for abortions or their children's care, many in the upper-middle class are far more concerned with such medical luxuries as high-tech infertility treatments and cosmetic surgery. Young college women get bulimia; less affluent young women are more likely to suffer from toxemia of pregnancy, which is basically a consequence of malnutrition.

**Housework.** In the '70s, housework was a hot feminist issue and a major theme of consciousness-raising groups. After all, whatever else women did, we did housework; it was the nearly universal female occupation. We debated Pat Mainardi's famous essay on "The Politics of Housework," which focused on the private struggles to get men to pick up their own socks. We argued bitterly about the "wages for housework" movement's proposal that women working at home should be paid by the state. We studied the Cuban legal code, with its intriguing provision that males do their share or face jail time.

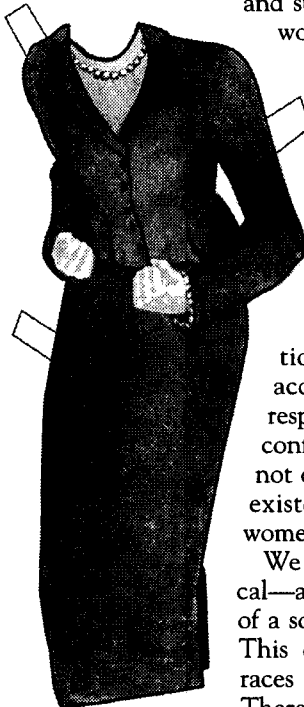
Thirty years later, the feminist silence on the issue of housework is nearly absolute. Not, I think, because men are at last doing their share, but because so many women of the upper-middle class now pay other women to do their housework for them. Bring up the subject among affluent feminists today, and you get a guilty silence, followed by defensive patter about how well they pay and treat their cleaning women.

In fact, the \$15 an hour commonly earned by freelance maids is not so generous at all, when you consider that it has to cover cleaning equipment, transportation to various cleaning sites throughout the day, as well as any benefits, like health insurance, the cleaning person might choose to purchase for herself. The fast-growing corporate cleaning services like Merry Maids and The Maids International are far worse, offering (at least in the northeastern urban area I looked into) their workers between \$5 (yes, that's below the minimum wage) and \$7 an hour.

In a particularly bitter irony, many of the women employed by the corporate cleaning services are former welfare recipients bumped off the rolls by the welfare reform bill so feebly resisted by organized feminists. One could conclude, if one was in a very bad mood, that it is not in the interests of affluent feminists to see the wages of working class women improve. As for the prospects of "sisterhood" between affluent women and the women who scrub their toilets—forget about it, even at a "generous" \$15 an hour.

The issues that have most successfully weathered class polarization are sexual harassment and male violence against women. These may be the last concerns that potentially

**The problem is not classism, the problem is class itself: the existence of grave inequalities among women, as well as between women and men.**



unite all women; and they are of course crucial. But there is a danger in letting these issues virtually define feminism, as seems to be the case in some campus women's centers today: Poor and working-class women (and men) face forms of harassment and violence on the job that are not sexual or even clearly gender-related. Being reamed out repeatedly by an obnoxious supervisor of either sex can lead to depression and stress-related disorders. Being forced to work long hours of overtime, or under ergonomically or chemically hazardous conditions, can make a person physically sick. Yet feminism has yet to recognize such routine workplaces experiences as forms of "violence against women."

**W**hen posing the question—"can feminism survive class polarization?"—to middle-class feminist acquaintances, I sometimes get the response: "Well, you're right—we have to confront our classism." But the problem is not classism, the problem is class itself: the existence of grave inequalities among women, as well as between women and men.

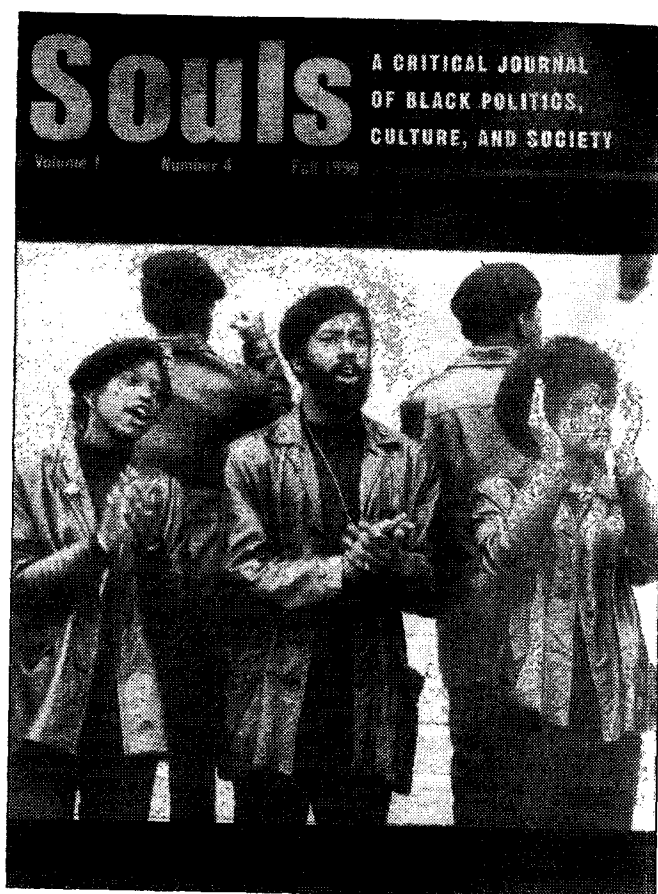
We should recall that the original radical—and, yes, utopian—feminist vision was of a society without hierarchies of any kind. This of course means equality among the races and the genders, but class is different: There can be no such thing as "equality among the classes." The abolition of hierarchy demands not only racial and gender equality, but the abolition of class. For a start, let's put that outrageous aim back into the long-range feminist agenda and mention it as loudly and often as we can.

In the shorter term, there's plenty to do, and the burden necessarily falls on the more privileged among us: to support working-class women's workplace struggles, to advocate for expanded social services (like childcare and health care) for all women, to push for greater educational access for low-income women and so on and so forth. I'm not telling you anything new here, sisters—you know what to do.

But there's something else, too, in the spirit of another ancient slogan that is usually either forgotten or misinterpreted today: "The personal is the political." Those of us who are fortunate enough to have assets and income beyond our immediate needs need to take a hard look at how we're spending our money. New furniture—and, please, I don't want to hear about how tastefully funky or antique-y it is—or a donation to a homeless shelter? A chic outfit or a check written to an organization fighting sweatshop conditions in the garment industry? A maid or a contribution to a clinic serving low-income women?

I know it sounds scary, but it will be a lot less so if we can make sharing stylish again and excess consumption look as ugly as it actually is. Better yet, give some of your time and your energy too. But if all you can do is write a check, that's fine: Since Congress will never redistribute the wealth (downward, anyway), we may just have to do it ourselves. ■





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# Women at Work

By Julianne Malveaux

**W**hat do Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart and Hewlett-Packard's Carly Fiorina have in common? According to *Fortune* magazine, they are among the 50 most powerful women in American business, potent examples of the way the corporate climate has changed in the past two decades. The Oct. 25 issue was the second time that magazine had published such a list. Presumably, before 1998 there were too few women to rank.

I'm tempted to describe these 50 women as icons who have shattered glass ceilings, but the top-ranked woman, Fiorina, says she doesn't believe glass ceilings exist. The *Fortune* list aside, women in corporate leadership are more the exception than the rule. And reality for most women is sharply different for the experiences of those at the very top.

According to a recent study by Catalyst, a New York-based nonprofit that works to advance women in business, women of color face a "concrete ceiling," not a glass one, when they try to move up the corporate ladder, earning as little as 60 percent of what white women earn, even when they are senior managers. Catalyst surveyed 1,700 women of color from 30 leading companies and found that barriers include lack of mentorship, informal networking and high-visibility assignments. "Not only is the 'concrete ceiling' more difficult to penetrate," says Catalyst President Sheila Wellington, "women of color cannot see through it to glimpse the corner office."

To be sure, there are exceptions, like Maxwell House's Ann Fudge, a recent winner of the Sara Lee Frontrunner Award. Most corporate women of color, though, combine lofty aspirations with realism. If white women aren't shattering the glass ceiling in droves, how can they expect to hurdle concrete barriers?

Women at the top generate lots of ink. Their achievements are often used as a "you can make it" reminder to those who see workplace barriers all around them, both at the bottom and the top—from the challenge of juggling work and family life to the struggles for equal pay and a working environment that is free of discrimination. When someone like Fiorina says there is no glass ceiling, it seems that issues of discrimination in the workplace are a thing of the past. But women who are entry-level employees or the middle managers may have very different perspectives as they chart their course to the top. The danger in focusing on women at the top is that it eclipses concern for more typical women, the majority of whom still work in clerical and service jobs. A world away from women who contemplate glass and concrete ceilings, those mired in the "sticky floor" of the workplace often deal with sweatshop conditions, low pay, unpaid overtime and other forms of economic oppression.

**W**orkers who hold low-paying service jobs—and they're mostly women—have hardly benefited from the six-year economic expansion that the Clinton administration proudly touts as one of its major achievements. About half of all women who work full time earn less than \$25,000 a year. Twelve million Americans—including 7 million women—scrape by on the minimum wage. These numbers are particularly revealing because much of the discussion about the economy focuses on low unemployment rates and labor shortages in technology areas. Scant attention has been paid to those at the bottom of the economy. These include women who have been forced off public assistance—who often must take low-wage, part-time jobs—and women who provide our society with essential services, such as home health aides who take care of our sick and elderly, but take home less than \$15,000 a year. When these women head households or have children, their pay sinks below the poverty line.

We've heard lots about "lazy" welfare recipients, but those who earn the minimum wage are working full time and still not making ends meet. Recent research about women and the minimum wage refutes all the stereotypes. Most aren't supplementing their income; instead the minimum-wage is all there is for them. Three-quarters of those who earn the minimum wage are adults—not teens. Nearly half of those in current minimum-wage jobs work full time. Most low-wage women are white, but women of color—who represent 22 percent of the labor force—make up a third of minimum-wage workers. And a third of those who would gain from a minimum-wage increase are parents. Nearly a million single moms alone would benefit from a minimum-wage hike.

The legislation proposed by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) would increase the minimum wage by \$1 over a two-year period, from the current rate of \$5.15 to \$5.65 next year, and then to \$6.15 in 2001. In states with higher minimum wages, and in cities that have passed living wage legislation, workers might not get a raise, but most workers will see their raises jump, in some cases out of poverty.

In Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and West Virginia, more than one in five women would get a raise if Congress passed a minimum-wage increase. According to the Economic Policy Institute and the Institute for Women's Policy Research, two Washington think tanks, more than half a million women in Texas and California and more than 300,000 women in Florida, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania, would improve their status.

Opponents of the minimum-wage increase say it would cause layoffs and high unemployment. But unemployment rates are lower than they have been in 30 years. Indeed, the work of the Economic Policy Institute and the Institute for Women's Research shows that employment levels of low-wage workers have increased dramatically, and that an increase in



the minimum wage is not likely to dampen employment prospects. Increasing the minimum wage would spread the effects of economic prosperity around by increasing the incomes of low-income families, especially single moms. It also would remind former welfare recipients that the transition from welfare to work can be rewarding.

**M**ore problems than pay confront working women, both at the top and at the bottom. But large corporations are employing fewer workers, which means that more of us work in temporary and part-time jobs, and at small companies that offer fewer benefits. The *Fortune* 500 job, at the bottom and the top, is seen as the "good job"—the alternative is often to become one of the more than 40 million Americans without health insurance. And while dozens of companies have developed "work-life" initiatives that offer flex-time and allowances for childcare needs, many human resource experts say the effect of these initiatives is weakened by pressing workloads. Similarly, we may be hearing less about complaints of sexual harassment and workplace discrimination not because these things are less likely to happen, but because women are reluctant to bring attention to themselves by complaining.

Economic expansion has generated a 401(k) windfall for workers. But women near the bottom of the economy don't contribute to these pension funds because they can't afford to. Nor do they invest in the stock market. Even when they know savings are important, earning 70 cents for every dollar men earn, they won't start saving until they think they have enough disposable income. Thus the pay gap transforms itself into a gap in retirement income, and older women, with longer life expectan-

cies and smaller pensions, are twice as likely as older men to spend their "golden" years in poverty. The economic status of many working women is jeopardized by their growing debt, and their status is likely to worsen because of proposed new bankruptcy laws that would make it more difficult for those who have credit card debt—usually women—to declare bankruptcy.

Working women face challenges in closing the pay gap. Organizing is the good news—women benefit when they're union members, earning as much as 30 percent more than nonunionized women who do the same work. The AFL-CIO women's division reflects expanded possibilities for the support of working women, and is a reminder of the benefits of tackling workplace issues collectively. In Los Angeles, for example, the Service Employees International Union gained the right, in February, to organize county home care workers who earned the state minimum wage of \$5.75 before unionization. Buoyed by that victory, organized labor has targeted the nursing home industry in other states, where some of the nation's lowest-paid workers are employed.

While women at the top remind us how far we have come, women at the bottom remind us of how much work there is to do. As long as the women who take care of our children and our elders, who serve our food and clean our clothing are paid less than a living wage, the struggle for gender equality continues. The challenge is to maintain an urgency in this struggle, even as an expanding economy and crumbling barriers treats us to the success stories of women like Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart and Carly Fiorino. ■

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington-based syndicated columnist.



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# Bad to Worse

## Welfare reform and feminist backlash

By Mimi Abramovitz

**W**elfare is disappearing. By March 1999, the national caseload had plummeted by almost 50 percent from its peak—with more stunning declines in many individual states. In three, the welfare rolls fell by more than 80 percent. In seven others, the decline was more than 60 percent. Only one state—tiny Rhode Island—showed a decline of less than 20 percent.

The shrunken rolls have elicited cheers of success from nearly every politician, policy-maker and presidential candidate. If reduction was the main goal of welfare reform, then reformers can rightfully claim victory. But if welfare reform set out to improve lives of the women and children who utilize it, something has gone dangerously awry. Few observers have noticed—or seem to care—that welfare reform undercuts the ability of all women to secure jobs with decent pay, reproductive freedom, caretaking supports and protection from domestic violence. Indeed, the effort to “reform” welfare comes as part of the wider backlash against the gains made by the women’s movement and the capacity of women to make their own choices about work and family life.

Since its enactment of part of the 1935 Social Security Act, the welfare program has come under periodic attack—largely because it serves women viewed as having departed from prescribed wife and mother roles and therefore “undeserving” of aid. Like now, earlier assaults forced women off welfare by declaring them unmotivated to work, stigmatizing single motherhood and tying assistance to moralistic behavioral standards. Then as now, the racial stereotypes of women of color as matriarchal and promiscuous lurked just below the surface and could not be missed.

The current drive to “reform” welfare began with the 1988 Family Support Act (FSA), which converted Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) from a program that allowed single mothers to stay home with their children into a mandatory work program. By 1992, playing to a decade of economic insecurity among middle-class Americans, politicians found that they could win votes by bashing government programs and the poor. Bill Clinton

rode this “economic panic” into office by promising to “end welfare as we know it.”

In 1994, the Republican Contract with America tried to end welfare altogether by converting it from a federal entitlement program into a state-administered block grant called Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). This historic shift gave the states more power to shape welfare. At the same time, it weakened the entire welfare state by eliminating critical federal supports. Unlike entitlements, Congress can cap the funds of block grants and subject them to annual budget negotiations. With this, the nation’s leaders effectively ended the federal government’s 60-year commitment—however begrudging and meager—to protect the downtrodden.

**Can’t make ends meet.** The main target of welfare reform was women’s work behavior. By placing a five-year lifetime limit on welfare eligibility (22 states have even shorter limits), the 1996 welfare law transformed AFDC into a temporary and transitional work program. The law upped the number of hours that women on welfare must work, penalized states with too few recipients in work programs, forced those lacking jobs to work off their benefits in menial public and private sector jobs, and otherwise stiffened welfare’s already tough work rules. In turn, local welfare departments cut benefits or closed cases for the slightest infraction of the many new rules, such as missing an appointment with a job counselor.

Many women forced off welfare found work—as they always do when a strong economy creates enough jobs. Even so, large numbers of former recipients now report that they cannot make ends meet. Low wages, part-time work, costly childcare, transportation and work expenses have left many women worse off than when they received welfare. In South Carolina, for example, a study by the National Council of State Legislatures found that 50 percent of the women kicked off welfare fell behind in rent or utility payments compared to 39 percent while on welfare. Fourteen percent said they could not afford medical care now, versus 3 percent before. In state after state—having also lost Food



Stamps, Medicaid and subsidized housing—many women have turned to food pantries, homeless shelters and social service agencies. Increasingly, women find themselves braiding hair, selling fruit by the roadside, providing in-home childcare or resorting to prostitution so their children can eat. This grim picture—which does not include the presumably worse-off women whom the researchers never found—will only grow darker in 2002, when welfare's five-year lifetime limit on benefits goes into effect in every state.

Welfare reform threatens the economic security of poor women first and foremost. However, working and middle-class women cannot rest easy given that welfare reform's time limits, stiff work rules and punitive sanctions help to keep wages low. Welfare reform lowers wages by flooding the labor market with thousands of additional workers. Even under today's more robust economic conditions, an increased supply of labor makes it easier for employers to press wages down for all workers and harder for unions to negotiate good contracts. To the extent that welfare reform has fueled deep cuts in other social programs it also has cost women the public sector jobs that lifted many of them into the middle class.

Finally, punitive welfare cuts affect a large number of women because cash benefits have the potential to boost gender equality. These benefits represent an economic back-up that can lessen women's dependence on men. The resulting autonomy, however limited, makes it easier for women to resist exploitation on the job and harder for employers to keep them in line.

Restoring the traditional family. The explicit goals of TANF also include discouraging single motherhood and encouraging the formation of two-parent families by regulating their childbearing and parenting choices. Federal law now allows state governments to impose a child exclusion or family cap rule that denies aid to children born while their mother is receiving welfare. As of March, about half the states adopted this provision, even though the average welfare family includes only two children—the same as the national average—and despite seven straight years of declining birth rates for teens. A few states experimented with the child exclusion rule before 1996. But Arkansas found no difference in birth rates between women subject to child exclusion and those who weren't. The New Jersey experiment led to lower

birth rates for women on and off welfare, but most of it reflected more abortions by women on welfare—at a time when abortion rates in both the state and the nation had fallen.

TANF also includes an "illegitimacy" bonus of \$20 to \$25 million per year for three years to be shared by the five states that lower birth rates the most among all unmarried women without increasing their statewide abortion rates above 1995 levels. The law also seeks to earmark \$250 million in matching funds for states that run "abstinence-only" programs in the public schools. By March, every state except California had accepted these funds.

Once the government wins the right to control the child-bearing choices of poor women, it becomes that much easier to tamper with the reproductive rights of all women. Welfare reform's regulations already extend beyond women on welfare to every woman. The "illegitimacy" bonus is based on the number of births by all unmarried women in a state. And abstinence-only programs shape the sex education programs available to all children in the nation's public schools, not just those on welfare.



Bill Clinton ends "welfare as we know it."

LARRY DOWNING/NEWSMAKERS

**Increasingly, women find themselves braiding hair, selling fruit by the roadside, providing in-home childcare or resorting to prostitution so their children can eat.**

Parenting. On the untested belief that financial deprivation will motivate "responsible" parenting, many states penalize women who deviate from prescribed behaviors by docking some or all of their benefits. Twenty-one states sanction women if they do not cooperate with paternity identification and child support rules; 17 states dock the check of mothers with truant children or those whose children do not get immunization shots on time. Eight states reduce the grant for missed pediatric health visits, while five states penalize women for not obtaining family planning services. Such sanctions ignore the deterioration of underfunded public schools, the shortage of medical services in poor neighborhoods and the often chaotic nature of life in poverty. Few supporters of welfare reform know—or even ask—how women forced to leave welfare cope with sickness, unpaid bills, kids wanting brand name tennis shoes, men who do not pay child support, and the shame of having to repeatedly ask friends and relatives for time and money.

Nor has welfare reform's "concern" about parental responsibility translated into policies that help women care for their children. TANF's strict work requirements make it

harder for poor women to supervise their children, especially when the women face substandard housing, overpriced food, unsafe neighborhoods and lack of childcare services. Child welfare advocates fear that the combination of deeper poverty, mounting stress and the greater willingness of officials to remove children from their homes will eventually create a tremendous burden on the relatives of poor single mothers and the nation's foster care system.

By insisting that women on welfare must go to work to receive aid, welfare reform downplays the value of the caretaking performed by all women at home. The burden of balancing work and family responsibilities has been worsened by years of cutting housing, health care, childcare, elder care and other social programs, effectively shifting both the cost and burden of caretaking from the government back to the home.

**Domestic Violence.** Among women on public assistance, 50 to 65 percent women have experienced sexual or physical abuse as adults, usually at the hand of a spouse or boyfriend. Most women deal with abuse by trying to leave. But fears of economic deprivation often frustrate their efforts. When women try to improve their skills, take a job or pursue child support too aggressively, some husbands and boyfriends become threatened to the point where they try to stop women's childcare and transportation arrangements, disrupt their work with harassing phone calls or simply beat them black and blue. Welfare has been one program that made it possible for any woman to escape these dangerous relationships—no matter her income.

To protect women's safety, feminist groups won inclusion

of the Family Violence Option in the 1996 welfare law. This requires states to screen for battering, provide services and waive work and paternity requirements so that the loss of welfare benefits does not force desperate women to accept support from abusive partners. However, many states have failed to enforce this measure. In some cases they claim that women will feign having been battered to exempt themselves from welfare's rules.

Critics say that access to government aid induces "dependency." But welfare rights advocates suggest otherwise. For one, they insist that poverty is the problem and that welfare reform exploits poor women's dire financial situation, forcing them to trade their marital, child bearing and parenting preferences for a welfare check. Advocates also believe that access to income outside of marriage—through employment or government aid—has the potential to increase women's economic independence. This, in turn, can strengthen women's power within the family, increase their leverage on the job, and simply allow women to raise children on their own.

Women on welfare are organizing. There are nearly 200 welfare rights groups across the country working to promote higher benefits, guaranteed annual income and a living wage. We must back these demands—for social policy rarely changes for the better unless pressed from below. ■

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# Back to the Womb

## Chipping away at abortion rights state by state

By Annette Fuentes

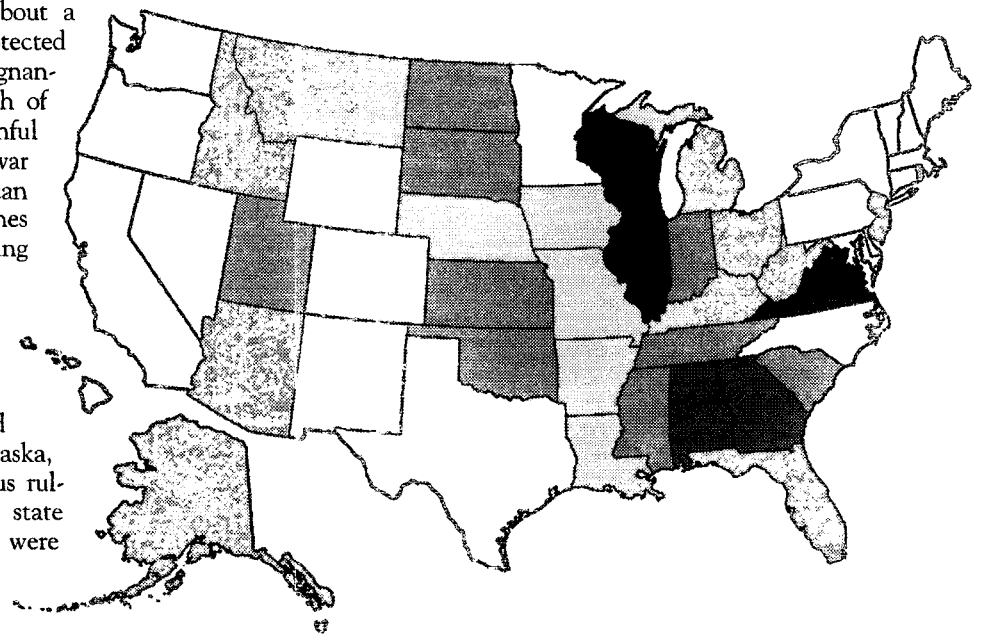
For anyone who still cares about a woman's constitutionally protected right to end an unwanted pregnancy, September was a schizoid month of reassuring legal victories and painful political loss. In the ongoing uncivil war over women's autonomy, both sides can chalk up one, even as the skirmishes over abortion rights seem to be edging toward yet another showdown in the Supreme Court.

On Sept. 24, pro-choice advocates scored a trifecta when the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis overturned the late-term abortion laws of Nebraska, Arkansas and Iowa. The unanimous rulings on the three nearly identical state prohibitions declared that the laws were written so broadly that they would render illegal even common abortion procedures.

Supposedly aimed at banning dilation and extraction abortions—the so-called “partial birth” procedure—the states' laws would place an “undue burden” on women's right to abortion, the appellate panel ruled.

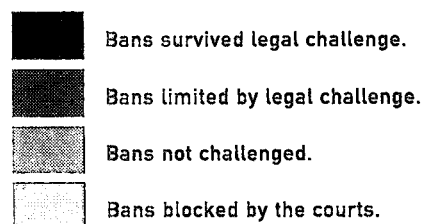
If pro-choice activists couldn't thoroughly savor their win, it's understandable. Just a week earlier, they watched as Missouri legislators overrode Gov. Mel Carnahan's veto of the “Infant's Protection Act.” The state's law was dubbed “atavistic” by Planned Parenthood President Gloria Feldt. Janet Benshoof of the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (CRLP) simply called it the most restrictive abortion law in the nation.

Forget parental consent, mandatory counseling and waiting periods. Those restrictions are kid stuff. Missouri's law gives a legal defense to those who commit violent acts against abor-



### The State of Late-Term Abortion Bans

Since 1995, 30 states have passed laws to ban dilation and extraction abortion procedures. Abortion rights advocates went to court in 21 states and succeeded in blocking or limiting enforcement of those laws in 18 states.



tion clinics or providers; it creates the crime of infanticide as a felony punishable by life in prison, and makes both the doctor and the patient receiving an abortion criminally liable. And in so doing, Missouri's law imposes harsher restrictions on women and providers than existed in the state before *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. For now, an injunction puts the law on hold until a trial in March 2000 decides its constitutionality.

For reproductive rights defenders, this one-step-forward, two-steps-back scenario has played out over and over again since the first laws banning dilation and extraction abortions appeared in 1995. Congressional attempts to outlaw late-term abortions have been stymied by presidential veto and persistent but dwindling Senate opposition to any infringements on women's right to choose. But in state legislatures across the nation, bills authored with the help of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), the largest anti-abortion lobby in the country with 50 state affiliates, have multiplied. In just four years, 30 states have passed laws restricting abortion procedures. Most, like the Missouri statute, use vaguely worded terms that essentially give personhood to a fetus and reduce women to wombs.

Eve Gartner, a staff attorney at Planned Parenthood, says the NRLC was the driving force behind the initial wave of state laws. The group sent around a draft bill to its legislative supporters, which described the procedure as "partial vaginal delivery." The first bill passed by Congress and authored by Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) used the NRLC model. Santorum's latest version of the bill is essentially identical to the three bills struck down by the federal appeals court in September. On Oct. 21, it passed in the Senate 63 to 34, three votes short of overriding another presidential veto.

"In virtually every case, the laws as drafted ban some of the most safe and common abortion procedures during early pregnancy," Gartner says. The Missouri law, for example, is a two-page, ambiguously worded act that doesn't specifically mention "partial-birth" abortions. Instead, it defines the terms "born," "living infant" and "partially born" so that a fetus as young as five or six weeks old could be considered a living infant. Abortions that suction the fetus could be deemed infanticide if the law were interpreted to make the fetus a viable infant and the procedure a partial birth. In criminalizing the doctor and patient, the law states: "A person is guilty of the crime of infanticide if such person causes the death of a living infant with the purpose to cause said death by an overt act performed when the infant is partially born or born."

**S**ensible people might conclude that efforts to pass laws restricting abortions are ultimately futile because federal courts have wasted little time in striking them down. Even Louis DeFeo, author of Missouri's law and head of the Missouri Catholic Conference, says, "To be honest, nobody knows whether this law will be constitutional or not." But anti-choice activists who have championed the "partial-birth abortion" strategy can claim significant advances on the

political front even if they've suffered judicial setbacks. They've put abortion rights advocates on the defensive by focusing on one little-used procedure in all its gruesome detail: Labor is induced, the legs are partially delivered, the skull is punctured with a sharp object and the contents removed by suction to allow it to fit through the cervix.

Spending a reported \$4 million to prime the public before the first bill was introduced in Congress, anti-choice activists have pressured moderates to stake out a position against dilation and extraction or risk being labeled a supporter. Supposedly pro-choice politicians seem to have lost their bearings—and their spines—arguing that bans on late-term abortions would be O.K. if they had an exception to protect the health and life of the mother. Gov. Carnahan is one example; he announced that he would have supported the Missouri law if it contained an exception for women's health and specified the dilation and extraction method.

For moderate Republicans who'd prefer to avoid the abortion issue entirely, dilation and extraction is a godsend. "All these Christian-right groups have given people something to rally around," Benshoof says. "The partial-birth ban gives politicians who want to seem reasonable—like George W.

Bush—a place to go. It's a safe harbor. By railing against partial birth abortions, they don't have to take a stance on the real issue of choice."

Pushing the anti-choice agenda in state legislatures, even in the face of likely court defeats, also depletes the resources of advocacy groups such as CRLP and Planned Parenthood. It keeps them in court and on the defensive. Gartner notes that when

Planned Parenthood won its first challenge to a state law in Michigan, it got a \$250,000 settlement for attorney fees, much less than what they'd spent on the litigation. And the court action is only one front on which advocates must fight. Gartner notes that Planned Parenthood faces challenges every day in keeping the doors open at the hundreds of clinics it operates across the country. "We have to deal with adversaries on many levels," she says, "even on the level of the true crazies who resort to violence, fire bombs and guns."

Where the legal and legislative wrangling is headed is not clear. The anti-choice strategy is to chip away at abortion rights one trimester at a time, aware that support for choice diminishes as a woman's pregnancy advances. Although federal and state appeals courts have enjoined restrictive abortion laws in 18 states, the federal Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals has let stand a ban in Virginia. And, on Oct. 26, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals upheld laws banning dilation and extraction in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Gartner says the Supreme Court is more likely to step into a dispute when there is a split like this among the circuit courts. "No one genuinely believes that the Court will go back on *Roe v. Wade*," she adds. "The anti-choice movement may try to convince the justices to limit certain abortion procedures." The Supreme Court already revisited abortion in 1992 in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, a ruling that reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade*. But the Court also allowed states to prohibit abortions when the fetus is deemed "viable" outside the mother's womb, as long as there is an exception to protect her life.

**It's in the battle for the hearts and minds of the American public that the anti-choice forces appear to have made their most significant and scary inroads.**



It's in the battle for the hearts and minds of the American public, though, that the anti-choice forces appear to have made their most significant and scary inroads. A January 1998 *New York Times* poll on abortion rights compared results to those of a survey conducted 10 years earlier and found that support for legal abortion was slipping. Although the majority still supports legalized abortion, it now feels abortions should be harder to get and chosen less frequently. In 1989, 40 percent favored unrestricted access to abortion; in 1998, only 32 percent did, with 45 percent believing restrictions should be imposed. Nearly 80 percent supported parental consent for teens and 24-hour waiting periods before abortions.

But those who credit the anti-choice movement for effecting shifts in public attitudes are giving them too much. Gory pictures of fetuses have long been the stock-in-trade of anti-abortion activists, and there have always been right-to-life legislators. Anti-choice activists have been successful because they've been able to ride the wave of a persistent backlash against women and feminism. Reproductive rights are the single greatest symbol of women's modest gains and the most obvious target of fundamentalist crusaders. Without a fertile climate of hostility toward women's autonomy, anti-choice elements would still be parading around with those tacky posters of supposed aborted fetuses dumped in trash cans.

The poll's most telling statistics reflect the anti-feminist trend, with many respondents claiming that women cavalierly choose abortion instead of accepting "responsibility for having sex." In 1989, 37 percent of those polled believed a woman should be able to get an abortion if the pregnancy would interrupt her career; 10 years later, only 25 percent did. And almost half said it was too easy to get an abortion today. Ironically, data from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the current rate of 20 abortions per 1,000 women is the lowest rate recorded since 1975.

The anti-choice movement can rightly claim advances in making abortions more difficult to get and influencing the public debate on women's reproductive rights. But there is little proof that groups like the NRLC are becoming a larger force, just more sophisticated and able to exploit public antipathy toward women's autonomy. Twenty years ago, conservative legislators failed to make headway with a Human Life Amendment that would have granted full rights to a fetus and banned abortion. Today, that strategy has morphed into "infant protection" and "partial birth" laws at the state and federal level.

Pro-choice forces are undoubtedly on the defensive, holding the line against government intrusion into women's wombs. The bulwark of their defense has been and will continue to be the courts, charged with enforcing a woman's constitutional right to privacy and to choose to terminate a pregnancy. For as long as *Roe v. Wade* remains the law of the land, that is. But for a growing number of women, the right to choose is nothing more than a theory. State restrictions on abortions, including parental consent and term of the pregnancy, as well as the ever-shrinking pool of doctors performing abortions, scarcity of clinics and financial barriers for poor women, already make abortion inaccessible if not illegal. And in the end, that's what really matters. ■

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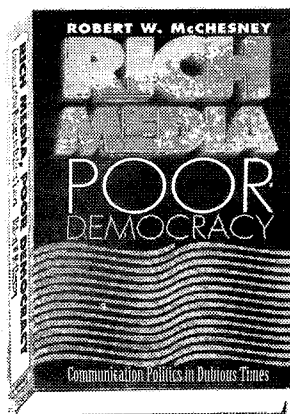
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# Seattle Showdown

## Citizens stand up to the WTO

By David Moberg

**W**hen the World Trade Organization planned this year's high-level meeting of trade ministers, Seattle must have seemed an ideal location—a major port city built on international trade and home to world-spanning corporations like Boeing and Microsoft. But the global trade bureaucrats are surely now having second thoughts. Tens of thousands of citizen activists—environmentalists, farmers, unionists, advocates for poor countries and a cornucopia of critics of globalization and multinational corporations—are expected to join them at the end of November, engaging in everything from teach-ins and mass rallies to civil disobedience and an eight-hour shutdown of ports on Puget Sound.

In the throng will be people like 48-year Gerald Gunderson, a Steelworker at a Milwaukee chain factory and member of the Wisconsin Fair Trade Campaign. Gunderson helped stop—for now—a multinational mining venture that threatened to pollute Wisconsin rivers and lakes prized by fishermen and the Chippewa tribe. "I would like to see the WTO just stopped entirely," he says. "I don't think it can be reformed until people affected by institutions like the WTO have representation proportionate to their numbers."

Launched in 1995, the World Trade Organization has become a lightning rod for critics of global corporations, whether they're concerned about threats to democracy, national sovereignty, genetically modified food or workers rights. In the name of promoting free trade, the WTO serves to codify the rules of the global economic game in ways that strengthen the hand of multinational corporations. In its first four years, the critics' worst fears were reinforced by decisions that consistently elevated increased trade above all other interests. The WTO, however, is a zealous handmaiden of corporate globalization, not the root cause of threats to the environment, public health or the well-being of working people. While it gives legal force and legitimacy to corporate global interests, stopping the WTO—as many protesters would like—is, at best, a first step toward creating rules for the global economy that tame corporate power and protect popular aims and democratic processes.

**C**ompared to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that preceded it, the WTO has more power—decisions of its dispute panels are binding and a consensus of all 134 member governments is needed to block them (previously consensus was needed to enforce obligations). It also covers far more than tariffs and trade in goods. The WTO agreement ventures into protection of intellectual property rights and investments, freeing trade in services and elimination of non-tariff trade barriers. While countries frequently use non-tariff devices to unfairly restrict foreign competition, many legitimate

environmental and public health regulations also may incidentally restrict trade.

Yet in the world according to the WTO, trade is supreme and unrestricted commerce is the highest value. For example, the WTO overturned U.S. regulations to promote cleaner gasoline on a challenge from Venezuela and ruled against another U.S. requirement that all shrimp fishing boats use a device to prevent harm to endangered sea turtles. In an ongoing controversy, the WTO ruled that the European Union could not ban beef containing artificial hormone residues on the grounds that there was not sufficient scientific evidence. So far, according to Lori Wallach and Michelle Sforza of Public Citizen, "no democratically achieved environmental, health, food safety or environmental law challenged at the WTO has ever been upheld. All have been declared barriers to trade."

The WTO also casts a shadow over governmental policies far beyond its actual decisions, which are made by panels of experts with a strong bias in favor of free trade and often very little knowledge about other issues affected by their rulings. Frequently, governments have retreated from a policy simply because another country has threatened—or may threaten—to file a WTO complaint. For example, Guatemala abandoned a policy, modeled on UNICEF recommendations, prohibiting any words or images that suggested baby formula was as good as breastfeeding. Gerber, whose label includes a fat, smiling baby, threatened a trade protest on the grounds that the law infringed on its trademark. In their book *Whose Trade Organization?* Wallach and Sforza note that threats of WTO action have scuttled South Korean food safety laws and weakened European bans on cruelly trapped fur. Threats also led to the defeat of Maryland legislation to boycott goods from Nigeria because of its human rights record (after the European Union and Japan had challenged a Massachusetts law prohibiting state purchases of goods from Burma) and to the veto by California Gov. Gray Davis of a law giving preference to local goods and services. The United States has threatened to go to the WTO over a Danish ban on lead in many products, South African efforts to provide AIDS drugs more cheaply, and Japanese measures to comply with the Kyoto climate change accord.

Critics contend that when the WTO presents governments with the choice of changing its laws or submitting to punitive tariffs on its exports, it threatens national sovereignty. But the fundamental challenge to national sovereignty really comes from global corporations and markets. Any international agreement represents a partial surrender of sovereignty in exchange, in theory at least, for some greater good. A "world trade organization" should manage trade in the interests of human rights, environmental protection, local economic development and other ends. Indeed, the Havana



charter of the WTO proposed at the close of World War II defined its mission to include protection of workers rights and other social goals. But in forming the current WTO, governments surrendered their power to regulate corporations and markets and acceded to what Wallach and Sforza call "corporate managed trade." "The WTO is the creation of states, so it hasn't escaped the power of states," argues Mark Levinson, chief economist of UNITE, the needle trades union. "It's an expression of the enormous power of business acting through states. It reflects the imbalance in global politics."

**W**hen the trade ministers meet in Seattle, the major issue will be expansion of the WTO through a new round of negotiations. WTO members have already agreed to discuss issues of agriculture and trade in services that were left over from the seven-year-long Uruguay round that concluded in 1994. The European Union and Japan have proposed a broad "millennial round" that would put most issues on the table, permitting countries to trade off special interests. The United States wants a narrower focus, with the hope of reaching early agreements on some issues, including ending agricultural subsidies, reducing industrial tariffs and restrictions on services (with greater privileges for private corporations to compete in traditionally public areas of education and health care), and protection of Internet business from any tariffs or restrictions. Many developing countries are resisting a broad expansion. They argue that they haven't yet benefited significantly from earlier trade liberalization. Many of them want an assessment of progress so far and faster reduction of barriers to trade in their products, such as the already scheduled phase-out of quotas on apparel and textiles.

There are serious differences on nearly all of these issues. Europe and Japan, like many developing countries, want the WTO to recognize that agriculture is "multifunctional"—producing food and fiber but also preserving rural social structure, protecting the environment and guaranteeing food security. The United States and other big agricultural exporters argue for a purely commercial approach, eliminating the subsidies that are a major part of European and Japanese agricultural policies. While environmentalists and family farm advocates in the United States admit that existing subsidies often contribute to overproduction or harmful practices, they argue that a free-market, export-oriented approach to agriculture is bad for small farmers, peasants in developing countries and the environment.

While it is likely that there will be further liberalization of trade in services, there is strong resistance from citizen groups, labor unions and some countries to the continued pressure for privatization of public services. Liberalization of trade in services also runs up against national policies to protect and develop local cultures. In resistance to the global cultural juggernaut of U.S. entertainment and mass media multinationals, the European Union—with France pushing hardest—wants WTO protections for "cultural diversity." For its part, the United States favors much stronger protection for multinational service companies and their investment rights, but unlike the European Union, it has been reluctant to push within the WTO for a broad deal like the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which was under negotiation among the rich countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The MAI col-

lapsed last year due to internal OECD disputes and global citizen group pressure.

Other issues, including some relatively new items, are equally contentious. The European Union is urging the WTO to adopt rules on competition policy, but the United States fears that a weak, lowest-common-denominator vision of antitrust policy would emerge and that the Europeans and Japanese, with support from many developing countries, primarily want to cut back on "anti-dumping" actions. The United States has relied on penalties against countries that sell below cost and disrupt industries, such as steel products "dumped" in the United States by crisis-wracked economies over the past two years. On the other hand, the United States will be pushing for new protections for biotechnology and intellectual property in genetically modified organisms. There will be strong resistance from some developing countries—which accuse multinational corporations of "biopiracy" of their natural resources and traditional crop strains. These nations will probably be supported by Europe, where there is much popular resistance to genetically modified "Frankenfoods."



**T**he international labor movement has long argued for the inclusion of a "social clause" that would protect core labor rights, but the WTO always has insisted that worker protection was the province of the International Labor Organization, which has no enforcement power. (By contrast, the WTO aggressively protects intellectual property rights, even though an international group already covered that issue.) The United States is obliged by law to push for labor rights protection and the European Union—in an about-face from four years ago in Singapore—now endorses WTO protection of labor rights (thanks largely to a change of government in Germany). There will be a push again for a WTO "working party" to discuss labor issues, which at the very least could become part of the periodic WTO review of each member country's trade policy and could lead to trade

sanctions for core labor rights violations (such as freedom of association and prohibition of child labor).

Labor rights are at the heart of another big issue before the WTO—the admission of China as a member. At this point, the United States is the main obstacle, but the Clinton administration desperately wants a deal to admit China in time for Seattle without any protection for Chinese workers rights. A near-deal last spring was scuttled because of swirling scandals about alleged

## Stopping the WTO is, at best, a first step toward creating rules for the global economy that tame corporate power and protect democratic processes.

spies, contributions to Clinton's 1996 campaign and continuing protests over human rights abuses. The United States claimed that China had made substantial commercial concessions, but now China has retreated, and it will be hard for Clinton to agree to a deal weaker than the one abandoned last spring.

Although the International Trade Commission claims that the United States would gain overall from China's entry into the WTO, critics contend that the ITC grossly underestimates the likely shift of manufacturing to China once corporations feel more legally secure. They point out that job loss to Mexico in just the first five years after NAFTA was eight times greater than the projected "long-term" job loss that the ITC had forecast. Critics also maintain that China has not lived up to past trade agreements and that its suppression of labor rights is an illegal subsidy to businesses there. If China is admitted without

an agreement to protect core labor rights, the prospect of the WTO ever protecting labor rights grows very dim.

Major environmental groups also want changes at the WTO. They argue that countries should be allowed to follow a "precautionary principle" in environmental and health legislation and that the WTO should "harmonize" international differences by establishing floors for protection rather than ceilings. Environmentalists also want countries to be able to use trade sanctions to enforce international environmental agreements and to distinguish among products based on how they are produced.

While the governments of developing countries (but typically not their labor and citizen movements) often view labor or environmental rules as "protectionist," they often agree with non-governmental organizations from rich countries on the need to open up the WTO to public scrutiny and involvement, including helping poor countries better defend their interests. Most also want the WTO to adopt moratoriums on many actions or most expansion until its record can be assessed.

**W**hile critics of the WTO agree broadly on many of its shortcomings, they have increasingly split—often in a nasty, divisive way—over whether the WTO can be reformed or simply should be abolished. Some hard-line critics who call for an end to the WTO have been harshly assailing the AFL-CIO and major environmental organizations for failing to do the same. Even within the labor movement, some union leaders doubt that the WTO will ever seriously address labor rights. But this misguided dispute threatens the citizen movement against the WTO at the very moment it is beginning to have some serious impact.

Undemocratic as the WTO may be, it is the creation of governments, and most of the powerful players are democracies. The triumph of corporate trade priorities at the WTO simply reflects the political power that corporations have in those governments and the inability of critics of globalization to move beyond defensive criticism toward an alternative model for a more democratic global economy. Unless the labor, environmental and citizen groups can work together to change individual government policies, there is little chance of them either reforming or abolishing the WTO.

With or without the WTO, there will be international trade, and there will be some kind of trading rules. Will it be politically easier to launch a completely new organization than to radically reform the WTO? Now, the best prospect for citizens and workers is to band together to throw sand in the gears of the machinery consolidating corporate power and the tyranny of the free market. But the long-range issue is citizens gaining power to make sure that the rules of global trade and investment serve the needs of workers, the environment and communities around the world. ■

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# Marched Out

## Can Farrakhan still make a million?

By Salim  
Muwakkil

**A**s a public spectacle and symbol of solidarity, the Million Man March of Oct. 16, 1995, was an enormous success. The event produced the largest public gathering ever of black Americans and spawned imitation "marches" for black women and youth. The Nation of Islam also is organizing a "Million Family March" to take place on Oct. 16, 2000.

Since the Million Man March was conceived and organized by NOI leader Minister Louis Farrakhan, its success represented a victory, of sorts, for the forces of conservative black nationalism. But as a tool for mobilization in the struggle for social justice, the event was less successful. Some analysts go further and argue that it not only was a strategic failure, but—because of its focus on religious traditionalism and psychological transformation—an actual barrier to effective social activism. Yet one effect of the march's symbolic success was to awaken the black radical tradition from more than two decades of torpor.

The founding of the Black Radical Congress in June 1998 was, in part, designed to contest the apparent nationalist victory. Organizers of the BRC argued the importance of inserting radical ideas into public discourse. Their strategy has had some effect. In recent months, an array of African-American groups, including the National Action Network, New Afrikan Movement, New Panther Vanguard Movement and National People's Democratic Uhuru Movement, have emerged pushing ideas that challenge the racial dogma and self-help nostrums of NOI-style nationalism. And Farrakhan's absence from public view—as he recovers from a bout with prostate cancer—has removed the NOI from the media limelight he attracts.

**T**hese developments have allowed critics of the march more media access and a popular consensus seems to have crystallized that assesses the 1995 event as an accidental success,



with no appreciable impact. Mainstream opinion devalued the march from the very beginning: The NOI leader had been so relentlessly demonized in corporate media that his role was too large a taint for the march to overcome.

But many black activists also were disquieted by Farrakhan's leadership, though they sensed his growing popularity within the African-American community and the enthusiastic response to his vision. Others understood that Farrakhan's upsurge in popularity fit an established pattern: Black nationalism and white conservatism are historical partners. The increasingly conservative political climate, exemplified by those "angry white men" who seized Congress for the GOP in 1994, fertilized the nationalist environment and added urgency to the upcoming march.

Farrakhan used this dynamic to boost interest in the event. In his first written appeal for participants, he began by noting that "there is an increasingly conservative and hostile climate growing in America toward the aspirations of black people and people of color for justice. The 'Contract with America' proposed by the Republicans and thus far agreed to by the Congress is turning back the hands of time, depriving the black community of many of the

gains made through the suffering and sacrifice of our fellow advocates of change during the '50s and '60s."

This focus served to soften criticisms of the march from the left. Except for a few bold souls, most left-leaning black activists offered just a tepid reproach. Radical forces in the black community already had been eclipsed by the nationalist ascension and many feared even further alienation had they criticized one of the most popular events in African-American history.

But Farrakhan's explicitly political pre-march rhetoric was de-emphasized during the event and his culminating speech was noteworthy more for its numerological mysticism, self-help nostrums and religious exhortations. "Why would you go to the master's house with no demands on the master?" asks Nathan Hare, CEO of the San Francisco-based Black Think Tank and co-founder of *The Black Scholar* magazine. "You don't need to go up there to talk about how we have sinned. The fundamental error with the march was that."

Some radical analysts have noted the similarities and ironies between Farrakhan's speech at the 1995 march and Booker T. Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895. In his speech, "Farrakhan announced a strategic retreat from sub-

complete "white out" of African issues in his speech. The first plank of the manifesto he crafted contained a commitment to "development of the African continent and the rest of the African World Community parallel with the development of Black America. Farrakhan's subsequent "World Friendship Tours" failed to appease many of these pan-Africanist advocates because of his embrace of questionable dictators and his refusal to condemn the excesses of Islamic zealots.

**T**he Million Family March so far has failed to attract Starks' interest, and many other activists also are taking a wait-and-see attitude about the planned event. The family gathering is scheduled to take place in Washington on the fifth anniversary of the Million Man March. Benjamin F. Muhammad—the fired executive director of the NAACP formerly known as Benjamin Chavis—is national director of the 2000 march, like he was in 1995. "The purpose of the Million Family March quite simply is to strengthen the black family, which has been decimated by an overdependence on government programs and the philanthropy of the oppressor," Muhammad explained in a recent interview.

The widespread lack of interest in the event is in stark contrast to the fevered anticipation that surrounded the Million Man March. "I think many black people are Million Marched out," says Clarence Lusane, author of several books focusing on black America and a professor at American University in Washington. Lusane argues that the focus on mobilizing large numbers of black people for symbolic events is, in fact, detrimental to the struggle for social justice. "It's an enormous expenditure of energy and logistical wherewithal for very questionable benefits," he says. Moreover, he notes, the failure to exploit the energy of such gatherings tends to disillusion those idealistic participants who had such high expectations.

Despite the misgivings of the African-American left and much of the black intelligentsia, the Million Man March was a landmark event with effects that still reverberate today. It has become fashionable on the left to devalue the gathering as an assemblage of middle-class patriarchs bemoaning their loss of authority. But this caricature is not only faulty, it also helps reinforce the notion that the black left is out of touch with the African-American community.

There have been few quantifiable changes wrought by the march. The increase in black male voting totals in the 1996 election is one and an increase in black adoptions cited by the National Association of Black Social Workers is another. Some march supporters claim that falling crime and teenage pregnancy rates should also be attributed to the march, though those numbers began declining before 1995. As the Million Youth Marches and the Million Woman March show, it's at least clear that Farrakhan's canny nomenclature has caught on.

But the scheduled Million Family March, which, incidentally, is not limited to African-American families, appears to be a harder sell. Radical black organizations are not as intimidated by Farrakhan's success and increasingly will challenge the NOI's ideas for the direction of the black freedom struggle. Questions concerning what constitutes a family and other socially explosive issues are likely to become significant bones of contention.

The expected debate should enliven black political discourse in ways not seen since the early '70s. ■

## The Million Family March scheduled for October 2000 appears to be a harder sell.

stance to symbolism, from contestation to entrepreneurship, from transformative struggles to parallel development, and from demand to obligation," write Sundaite Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang in an essay that appeared in the Winter 1997 edition of *New Politics*. "Farrakhan's address came exactly 100 years and nearly one month after Booker T. Washington rose to national prominence pronouncing a similar shift in ideology, strategy and tactics."

Robert T. Starks compares the march to the 1920 convention of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which startled America by drawing nearly 30,000 people to New York's Madison Square Garden. Starks is an associate professor of political science at Chicago's Northeastern Illinois University and author of a rigorous Million Man March manifesto that was widely supported by a variety of black nationalist organizations. "During the first years of the century, Garvey galvanized the attention of the black masses like nothing before," Starks says. "And, unfortunately, until the Million Man March near the end of the century, nothing since." He dismisses the mobilizations of the civil rights era as interracial affairs more concerned with opening access to middle-class integrationists rather than true movements of the black masses.

Although he concedes that some opportunities were lost in the march's aftermath, Starks disputes those who argue that little was accomplished by the march. "There were substantial increases of black men voting as a result of the march and there was an increase in black adoptions. Many national organizations also reported a bump in their membership," he says.

As a black nationalist activist, Starks is more supportive of the march's motivations than his more radical counterparts. But even nationalists like Starks were critical of Farrakhan's



# Dreaming in Red

By Julie Greene

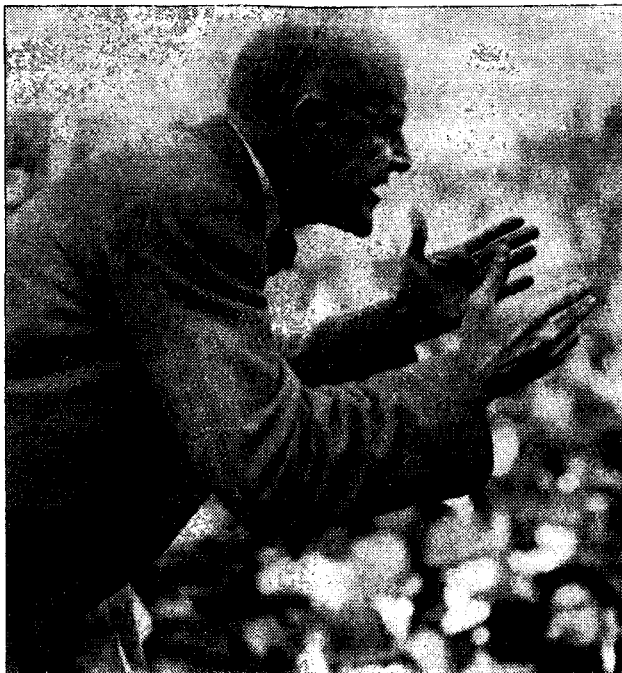
Two different personalities haunt the typical biography: the author and the subject. Currently national attention focuses on Edmund Morris, who turned himself into a fictional character in his biography of Ronald Reagan so that he could imagine, as a first-hand witness, key moments in Reagan's early life. But biographers have long been present as characters in their biographies. The real issue is how artfully and honestly the biographer manages that presence.

Consider the case of Marguerite Young and her posthumously published biography, *Harp Song for a Radical: The Life and Times of Eugene Victor Debs*. This sprawling and occasionally enchanting book introduces us evocatively to the mind and personality of Marguerite Young. She graces every page with a keen wit and a complex sense of

**Harp Song for a Radical: The Life and Times of Eugene Victor Debs**  
By Marguerite Young  
Knopf  
599 pages, \$35

American history. Yet the book arguably provides a richer sense of her consciousness than that of Eugene Debs, and there lies its main quandary.

Young was born in 1908 in Indiana; after growing up there and attending Butler University, she headed off to Chicago for graduate study. In 1944, she moved to New York City and remained there for 47 years, teaching creative writing at Columbia, among other places. Living in Greenwich Village, she became, as Charles Ruas writes in the book's introduction, "the living representative of its heyday as a literary center." Along the way, she published two books of poetry, a nonfiction study of failed utopias, and then, in 1965, her masterpiece: the novel *Miss Macintosh, My Darling*. Upon its publication, critics hailed Young as one of the most promis-



Marguerite Young spent 25 years working on her unfinished biography of Eugene Debs.

Altgeld, Susan B. Anthony, James Whitcomb Riley, George Pullman and James MacNeill Whistler.

As in her novel, Young's method seeks to capture the innermost consciousness of her subjects; she writes a rambling prose, in which observations and facts and sentiments pile gradually upon one another. The result reads like a dream of American history. Readers who loved John Dos Passos' USA trilogy likely will be charmed by Young's treatment. Those looking for a less dreamy style, on the other hand, may feel

ing writers to come along in decades; her style, highly impressionistic and subjective, was compared repeatedly to James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Some years after completing her path-breaking novel, Young began writing an essay on Debs and his years in Indiana. The project quickly expanded, filling her imagination with ideas about social reform and utopian visions in 19th century America and Europe. It became her focus for the next 25 years, and remained unfinished upon her death in 1995. It was left to Ruas, her longtime friend, to prepare the large manuscript for publication.

The resulting book is really a biography only in the loosest sense. Almost the first 200 pages examine social and utopian thinking in the early to mid-19th century. Young explores such figures as Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx and, above all, German Socialist Wilhelm Weitling, who moved to America and influenced labor struggles and radicalism. Even after she turns to her charismatic subject, Young remains as interested in the people, places and general zeitgeist as in Debs himself. The book is filled with lengthy and richly realized portraits of people like Allan Pinkerton, John

perplexed. For example, Young discusses at length the Molly Maguires, that legendary stealth group of violently disgruntled Irish miners in Pennsylvania. After Pinkerton detective James McParlan infiltrated their group, his testimony led to the conviction and execution of 20 miners:

That day in June when had occurred the transportation of the Molly Maguires by the one-way ticket which had been punched for their free passage across the River Styx at its high flood by the coal and railroad powers with the help of Gowen and his staff—greatly to the triumph of the many-clawed Allan Pinkerton, who, keeping himself remote, had sent not only McParlan but others to this Pennsylvania coal country as spies against the labor-union men whom he had accused of traitordom to old king coal and of being revolutionary communists and who had evoked no memory in him of the raggedy ex-jailbird Charney for whom the Chartist movement had seemed as provincial as one small patch of red earth in comparison with the red revolution which was to come—took place under the coldly falling rain, the dark storm clouds.

At times Young's book transports the reader away to the consciousness and

emotions of 1870s Americans. We learn about the penny-pinching Mrs. Lincoln, ordering that briefs be made for her husband out of old White House sheets and pillowcases, and as a result "careless old Abe" walked around with the initial M, for Madison, monogrammed on his butt. Or of Debs' father, originally from the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, who loved his homeland and kept a bit of French dust among his belongings all his days, so that he could be buried with it upon his death.

**B**ut what of Debs? He roams in and out of this book, appearing in the first pages but then largely disappearing until the second third of the book. Young traces Debs through his childhood in Terre Haute, Ind., his early years working on the railroad, and his job as editor of *The Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. But we do not ever reach, in any systematic way, the founding of the American Railway Union, the Pullman strike, the Industrial Workers of the World or the Socialist Party and Debs' many campaigns for the presidency as that party's candidate. Young's focus is more on the times themselves, from Wilhelm Weitling to the 1877 railroad strike, to reformers and utopians, than on Debs per se. She presumes that all these other events and personalities made Debs into the person he became, but too often these influences are not demonstrated.

Finally, while Young's approach to history is highly romantic and evocative, she does not put forward a nuanced vision of historical change and causation. A heavy air of inevitability hangs over this book. Figures like Samuel Gompers seem pre-ordained to develop in a certain way: From the first time she introduces us to Gompers, though he's just a young cigarmaker, she sees in him the man who will reject all radical ideas to become a labor conservative. More problematically, Debs seems formed in terms of his social and political philosophy virtually upon birth. After Pullman, she tells us, Debs "never again would be removed from the great crucible of social conflict," and more tellingly, she continues, "in a profound sense never had been outside it." Describing the power wielded by the likes of Marshall Field and George Pullman, Young asks:

"How could Debs not come into conflict with them although he was weak and they were strong?"

This presents a very different interpretation of Debs' evolution than those offered previously, and arguably it is a less accurate one. According to Ray Ginger's 1949 biography of Debs, still the richest portrait we have of him, his route from conservative member of a railroad brotherhood to radical politics is the most significant event of his early decades. Nick Salvatore's 1982 biography concurs. In the 1870s, for example, Debs was more conservative than Gompers, opposing strikes, boycotts and closed shops. By the 1890s this had changed: Debs had transcended craft unionism, and stood as the personification of a militant and broadly defined labor movement. A decade later, Debs was Gompers' worst

nightmare of a Socialist leader. It is precisely this leftward evolution that puts Debs at the center of U.S. history in the Gilded Age.

This is a shortcoming in a book that examines Debs' early decades, but it is perhaps not surprising. For this is Marguerite Young's book, and to her credit she maintains her presence in a graceful way at all times. If ultimately we hear her song more clearly than Debs', it is nonetheless a remarkable song to behold, one that brings alive the overlapping worlds of politics, labor struggles, utopian visions and reform strategies during an age of transformation. ■

*Julie Greene teaches history at the University of Colorado. She is the author of Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881 to 1917.*

## One Day Longer

By Craig Aaron

**A**s a kid, I used to spend part of every summer with my grandparents in a sleepy, one-stoplight town on the banks of the Ohio River. Ravenswood, West Virginia, is the type of friendly, rural place where folks aren't ashamed to raise the stars and stripes over the garage, where they still get together down by the river for covered-dish din-

### **Ravenswood: The Steelworkers' Victory and the Revival of American Labor**

By Tom Juravich and  
Kate Bronfenbrenner  
Cornell University Press  
245 pages, \$29.95

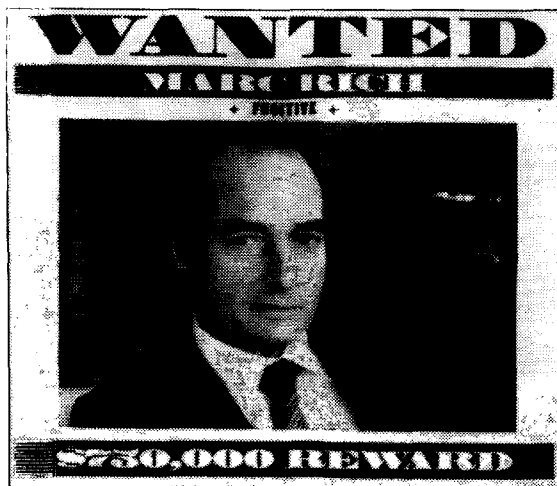
ners, where no one locks their cars at night. It was quite a culture shock for a kid who spent the rest of the year in the big city and suburbs. But those weeks in Ravenswood were an education: I learned to bait a fishhook, cut a switch, shuck an ear of corn—and that there's still power in a union.

Growing up during the Reagan/Bush years, you didn't hear much good said about unions. It was a time of defeat and retreat: the air-traffic controllers,

Phelps-Dodge, Hormel. So in 1990, when my grandfather and 1,700 other members of United Steelworkers Local 5668 were locked out of the Ravenswood Aluminum Company, the stage was set for another painful, discouraging labor defeat. Only that's not what happened. As Tom Juravich and Kate Bronfenbrenner write in *Ravenswood*, their comprehensive chronicle of the conflict, through "a combination of strategic brilliance and rank-and-file fortitude" the Steelworkers actually won.

Though the authors are labor researchers at the University of Massachusetts and Cornell University, respectively, this isn't your prototypical labor studies textbook. Part tribute to the workers, part union strategy session, part international mystery, *Ravenswood* is an engaging, detailed (perhaps too detailed) look at an important turning point for the American labor movement. "Ravenswood was more than just a victory of aluminum workers in a small town in West Virginia," they write. "It demonstrated something that had been unclear for more than a decade—labor could still win."





Left: Fugitive financier Marc Rich. Below: The Steelworkers march back into the RAC plant after a 20-month lockout.

When Kaiser Aluminum opened a smelter and fabrication plant in Ravenswood in 1956, workers came from rural West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky, staying for decades until they could afford the ranch-style homes, manicured lawns and extra-cab pickups of the middle class. For 30 years, there was labor peace. But by the late '80s, Ravenswood ran smack into the new global economy. Kaiser fell prey to corporate raiders and the West Virginia plant was sold off, eventually ending up in the hands of Willy Strothotte, a Swiss metals trader, and R. Emmett Boyle, a former plant manager with a grudge against the union who ran day-to-day operations. The plant was rechristened Ravenswood Aluminum Company, or RAC.

Boyle had one clear goal: to bust the union. The Steelworkers' contract was set to expire on Oct. 31, 1990. But during negotiations that fall, management began erecting a fence around the plant, covering transformers with steel-plate armor, installing video cameras and hiring a new security force. They bused in replacement workers and trained them at a nearby motel. Asking for major concessions and refusing to discuss health and safety issues, RAC hoped the union would strike so they could permanently replace the work force.

When the Steelworkers offered to keep working under the old contract, the company refused, declared an impasse in negotiations and locked them out. RAC figured if they could entice a few hundred workers to cross the picket line, the union would fold. But in nearly two years, only 17 workers returned to the plant as scabs. This solidarity was the foundation of the Steelworkers' win.

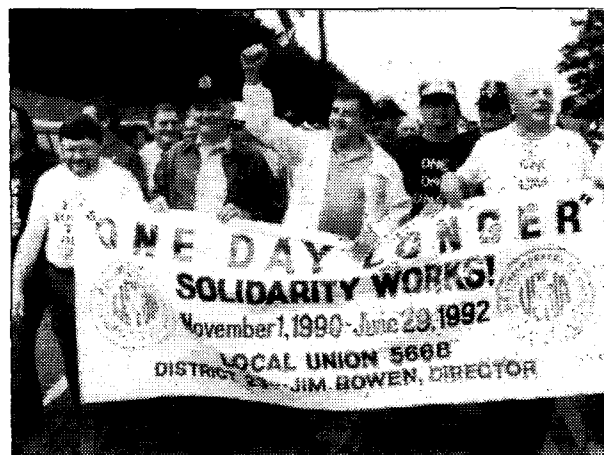
effective in pressuring the company to return to the bargaining table." Indeed, Boyle had hired a thousand scabs and claimed that the plant was running at 90 percent capacity.

The union went on the offensive, developing a groundbreaking, multifaceted "coordinated campaign" that extended the proverbial picket line far beyond Ravenswood. Members of Local 5668 took off on morale-boosting road trips, leafleting at the Kentucky Derby and a speech by Boyle in Vancouver, British Columbia. They trailed every truck leaving the plant, and began pressuring RAC clients like Stroh's, Anheuser-Busch and Coca-Cola to avoid scab aluminum. Pointing to RAC's horrendous safety record—four workers had been killed at the plant during the summer before the lockout, after only two deaths in all the years before Boyle took over—the union pushed for an investigation by OSHA, which later hit the company with more than \$600,000 in fines.

But the union's real breakthrough came when they were anonymously sent a copy of an internal RAC audit, which clued them into the company's mysterious ownership network and connected RAC to international financier Marc Rich. Nicknamed "Aluminum Finger," Rich was said to control as much as 40 percent of the world's aluminum market. He would

normally have little to fear from a few West Virginia Steelworkers. But Rich was a fugitive, wanted by American authorities for evading taxes, mail fraud, racketeering and trading with the enemy. He was accused of illegally buying Iranian oil during an embargo and then selling the discounted oil to major American producers as his own for a tremendous profit. Rich also was suspected of smuggling oil into South Africa during apartheid and dealing in Iraqi oil during the Gulf War. Facing more than 300 years in prison and a \$750,000 reward for his capture, Rich stayed holed up in Zug, Switzerland, where he couldn't be extradited.

In Rich, the Steelworkers had found the perfect villain. Though they couldn't hope to wound him financially, there were other pressure points. "Obsessed with secrecy and privacy, he would do everything he could to avoid attention from the media," Juravich and Bronfenbrenner write. "Publicity was a threat to his ability to negotiate secret trade deals that danced on the edge of legality and corporate ethics. And most of all, publicity threatened his efforts to work out a deal with the U.S. govern-



JOHN HIMELRICH

ment so that he could return to the United States without going to jail."

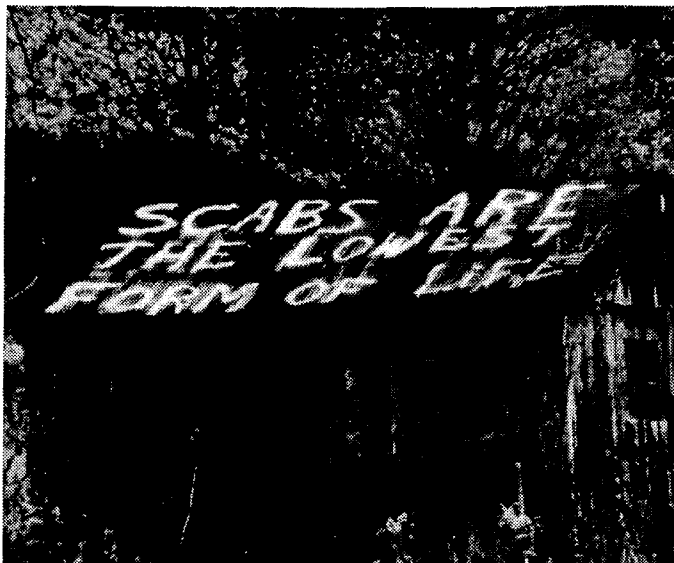
So in the summer of 1991, a small delegation of union activists, including a half-dozen members of Local 5668, went to Europe, traveling across the continent to demonstrate against Rich and to tell the story of how an infamous white-collar criminal was destroying working families to other unions and labor-friendly politicians. They passed out "Wanted: Marc Rich"

posters at a black-tie dinner sponsored by the London Metals Exchange and protested outside of Rich's headquarters in Zug, performing before international television cameras with papier-mâché puppet caricatures of Rich and Mother Jones. They headed to Amsterdam to meet with bankers who had extended credit to RAC, warning them of the millions the company owed the Steelworkers in back pay. When the union heard Rich planned to buy the Slovakian National Aluminum Co., Steelworkers President Lynn Williams sent a letter to Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel, asking him not to deal "with a criminal who represents the worst of Western capitalism." A month later, the deal was put on hold. "The union campaign was no longer costing Rich only his privacy and peace of mind," Juravich and Bronfenbrenner write. "The Steelworkers had proven that they could also interfere with Rich's ability to do what he did best—trade and invest behind closed doors."

By the end of the lockout, the union had initiated anti-Rich activities in 28 countries on five continents and derailed an attempt by Boyle to take sole control of the company. They wanted Rich to make a move to break the stalemate. Finally, he did. After the demonstration outside his offices in Zug, Willy Strothotte, backed by Rich, held secret meetings with the Steelworkers leadership to discuss whether a deal could be made with Boyle out of the way. Strothotte soon seized majority control of RAC, packed the board of directors and ousted Boyle. Steelworker Jim Bowen sent Boyle a fax saying, "How does it feel to be permanently replaced?"

Negotiations resumed and a new contract—calling for the firing of replacement workers, a \$1.25 an hour pay raise, a lump-sum payment of \$2,000 and a profit-sharing plan—was overwhelmingly approved by the rank and file. Triumphant, the Steelworkers walked back through the gates on June 29, 1992.

It was a big win, but the local didn't necessarily win big. The union had to



**T**he victory at Ravenswood, Juravich and Bronfenbrenner write, "demonstrated that the new powerful yet diffuse corporate structures are not impenetrable to workers and their unions." With the lack of strong labor laws and growing corporate power, labor disputes can rarely be won anymore just on the shop floor or at the bargaining table. As in Ravenswood, it takes a combination of local determination, solidarity and creative militancy along with the implementation of a com-

prehensive, multifaceted, constantly evolving international strategy.

Learning from the Ravenswood experience, unions should start researching corporate structures and potential allies long before a strike or lockout starts, not just after the traditional methods sour. Coordinated campaigns must harass and intimidate management from day one with demonstrations at shareholder meetings, pressure on OSHA and the EPA to investigate safety and health violations, appeals to banks not to finance deals under the threat of removing union pension money from the vaults, and help from still-strong foreign unions. In short, says Becker, now president of the Steelworkers, "escalate, escalate, escalate."

Following this model, the Steelworkers won protracted contests at Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel and Bridgestone-Firestone Tire. Similar strategies are being used in a range of ongoing showdowns, including a nine-month lockout of 3,100 workers at Kaiser Aluminum in Washington State (see "Striking Back," Oct. 3).

But for me, the best endorsement for Ravenswood wasn't the book jacket blurbs from Noam Chomsky or John Sweeney. The last time I stopped in Ravenswood, my grandparents didn't want me to leave too early, so they might have time to go downtown and pick up a copy of this book. They were proud that Ravenswood was being recorded in the annals of labor history, where it belongs. ■

give up its veto on job classification combinations and claims to full back pay, and it couldn't prevent scabs from being hired to fill new job openings. The locked-out workers had a difficult transition back to the daily grind of the plant, but for the past seven years Ravenswood has remained mostly peaceful.

This July, the Steelworkers signed another four-year contract with Century Aluminum, which bought the plant in

**Unions must harass and intimidate management from day one. As George Becker says, "escalate, escalate, escalate."**

1995. But on Aug. 16, after Century tried to fire a worker who they said damaged a huge smelting pot, the union went out on a violent, 19-hour wildcat strike, throwing rocks and smashing windows and costing the company millions when it had to shut down one of its three potlines for several weeks. A few weeks earlier, Century had announced it was selling part of the operation to Pechiney SA, a French aluminum company, which in turn may merge with Alcan, the Canadian aluminum giant. It's unclear who'll be signing the workers' next paycheck.



# Green Collar

By Dean Baker

**G**lobal warming still may not be on the policy agenda in Washington, but the long hot days of summer put it in the minds of many people across the country. The vast majority of scientists agree that we must act soon to limit the damage from the accumulation of greenhouse gases. Yet little progress has been made toward achieving even the first steps laid out in the 1997 international agreement reached in Kyoto, Japan.

If the corporate executives in coal, oil and other polluting industries have their way, global warming will never appear on the policy agenda. These industries are concerned about threats to their

such as finance, health care, teaching or retail trade. In most of these industries, it is difficult to imagine how it would

**An environmental economist shows that labor doesn't have to confront global warming with fear.**

even be possible for environmental regulations to cost jobs.

**B**ut even in manufacturing, Goodstein documents numerous studies showing that job losses attributable to environmental regulation are minimal. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, found that the number of jobs lost due to environmental regulation has averaged less than 3,000 per year. By comparison, job loss in manufacturing has averaged close to 30,000 per month over the past year and a half. Even in the most extreme cases, such as coal mining in Appalachia and logging in the Northwest, it turns out that environmental regulation has not been the primary cause of job loss.

In the coal industry, the real culprit has been increased produc-

tivity, as strip-mining has replaced labor-intensive underground mining. Coal production has actually increased since 1980, while employment has fallen by almost 60 percent. In forestry, jobs have been eliminated by rising productivity and a shift of investment to the South to take advantage of low-cost labor. Employment in the industry had already fallen by nearly 40 percent from its 1978 peak before the first logging restrictions went into effect in 1991. By comparison, the jobs lost due to environmental restrictions probably will not even be one-fifth as large. But regardless of this reality, unemployed miners and lumber workers are likely to blame environmentalists for their fate.

As Goodstein points out, the national media have been willing to uncritically repeat the industry line on jobs and the environment, thereby building the myth and creating a political environment that is often hostile to environmental regula-

**The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction About Jobs and the Environment**

By Eban Goodstein  
Island Press  
195 pages, \$27.50

profits. But to make the political case, they've tried to take the nation's workers hostage, threatening them with massive job losses if steps are taken to curtail the emissions of greenhouse gases. Eban Goodstein argues compellingly in *The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction About Jobs and the Environment* that workers have little to fear.

Goodstein is an environmental economist (disclosure: also a personal friend) who takes both the environment and jobs seriously. He has worked with the Economic Policy Institute over the past six years to create a pro-labor environmental agenda. In this time he has done several important studies analyzing aspects of the jobs-environment trade-off.

As the title of his book suggests, much of this work involves dispelling myths. Recent polls have showed that close to one third of all workers fear that environmental regulations may cost them their jobs. Yet job losses that can actually be attributed to environmental regulation are relatively few. Currently close to 80 percent of workers are employed in service industries,



*Untitled #2077* by Todd Hido, 1997. Chromogenic print. From **Sites Around the City: Art and Environment**, to be shown next spring at the Arizona State University Art Museum.

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tion. The worker who lost his job because of federal logging restrictions was a big story in the national news. The much larger group of workers who lost their jobs because the lumber mills moved to the South never got mentioned.

No matter how many jobs are actually lost as a result of environmental regulation, for the workers affected, it is still a disaster. The lumber workers in Oregon or the coal miners in West Virginia are unlikely ever to see another job that pays them anywhere near what they earn in these industries. It is unfair that they alone should be asked to pay the price of protecting the environment. Fairness demands real and substantial compensation for workers who lose their jobs due to environmental regulations. Goodstein analyzes the government programs that have been established to retrain workers and sustain the communities most affected by environmental regulations. He shows where and why they have succeeded, and more often, how they have failed.

**W**hile the book does much to attack the half-truths surrounding jobs and the environment, Goodstein does help to foster one myth: the possibility that green jobs may be more labor intensive. The discussion is reasonable, and Goodstein rightly points out that more labor-intensive jobs tend to be lower-paying jobs, but it would be better not to even raise the issue.

There is no reason for environmentalists, or anyone else, to prefer greater labor intensity of production. We can always find things for people to do, and if we can't, then most of us would be happy to work fewer hours. The myth that environmentalism is tied to more labor-intensive technologies helps promote the worst stereotypes of environmentalists as yuppies; the idea that we would prefer workers give up high-paying jobs in factories so that they can grow organic vegetables in their backyards invites contempt from the vast majority of working people. Goodstein certainly is not arguing anything of this sort, but the linking of environmentalism and labor-intensive employment may encourage less sophisticated readers to think in these terms.

As useful as this book will be to someone negotiating the dangerous turf between labor and the environ-

ment, the labor side of this discussion may believe that its concerns have been given short shrift. It's not that they can legitimately claim that Goodstein has low-balled the likely jobs impact of the Kyoto agreement. The discussion here is thoughtful and cautious. One can find industries where the Kyoto agreement likely will have a more significant impact than is suggested here. The most obvious example is the automobile industry. Complying with Kyoto may lead to no reduction in the number of vehicles being sold, but it will lead to a large shift from light trucks and SUVs to more fuel-efficient small cars. Virtually all the trucks and SUVs sold in this country are made by highly paid autoworkers in the United States (no one else buys these things). Disproportionately, the fuel-efficient cars that replace them will be made by foreign car manufacturers.

But the real reason why labor will be uncomfortable with this book is that they know they are looking at a situation where, whatever the job loss, they can count on very little assistance from the government. Having pushed through its trade deals without providing any serious compensation for the affected workers, the Clinton-Gore administration has no credibility on this issue when it comes to Kyoto. The fact that neither labor nor the environmental movement can trust this administration makes it all the more difficult to try to create some secure common ground. One could hope for a united front where the two constituencies push jointly for jobs and the environment—but Clinton can easily play one off against the other, promising environmentalists to move forward on Kyoto while doing nothing for workers.

However difficult the task, a labor-environment coalition can't let Clinton get away with this. Their unity is vital to the progress of both movements. This book will be helpful for those willing to try. ■

Dean Baker, a senior research fellow at The Preamble Center, writes a weekly media commentary, *The Economic Reporting Review*, available online at [www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org).



# Critical Condition

by Joshua Rothkopf

**W**hoever directed *Bringing Out the Dead*, with its psychotic paramedics cruising the rain-soaked streets of Hell's Kitchen in search of late-night redemption and the occasional gunshot victim, sure has cribbed up on his Scorsese—he really nailed it with the paranoia and the hookers and that troubled internal monologue. OK so he is Martin Scorsese. This seems to be cause for celebration among many critics. But what they see as a return to form is, to my eyes, a retreat to form—not necessarily a bad thing when the models in question are *Taxi Driver* and *After Hours*. It's a perfect match but somehow feels dead on arrival.

The '90s have been a topsy-turvy decade for Scorsese, who can't seem to sustain creative growth—of which he continues to show sporadic evidence—without interrupting his momentum for redundant forays into inconsequence: *Casino* is *GoodFellas* stripped of charm and coherence; his lurid remake of *Cape Fear* (was that really necessary?) neatly

## Bringing Out the Dead Directed by Martin Scorsese

negates the elegant restraint of *The Age of Innocence*. *Kundun* signaled a spiritual commitment that felt like a breakthrough; *Bringing Out the Dead* is the least audacious work of his career.

I'm being hard on Scorsese because he is supposed to be Saint Cinema—he carries a critical prestige that even extends to public events like the Oscars: A presenter of the highest authority, he's too good to ever win. *Bringing Out the Dead* just might change that. It's exactly the kind of mannerist work that will satisfy viewers whose taste for edginess began with *Mean Streets* and ended 20 years ago just shy of *Raging Bull*.

**S**till, Scorsese allows for a range of expressiveness that strains against the tired material to good result. Nicolas Cage comes up with all sorts of imaginative ways of seething in the blocked part of Frank Pierce, an EMS technician and self-described "grief mop." Haunted by the ghosts of those he couldn't save, Frank

makes for a particularly passive center: He pleads to be fired and is denied, he can barely look out the window and rarely drives the ambulance, leaving that to his rotating shift partner. Droopy and unshaven, Cage works with his eyes in a quiet, internal performance, while his voice-over suggests more provocative frustrations: "I hadn't saved anyone in months."

Early in the film, he meets his potential savior—the nervous daughter of a stroke victim—and I should now probably thank the screenwriter, Paul Schrader, for emphasizing that this character is named Mary. (Patricia Arquette, in damaged little-girl voice and an ex-junkie's haircut with blond roots, adds gravity to what could have been a very twitchy part.)

As Frank and Mary begin to make nice—she's often at the hospital waiting for news—*Bringing Out the Dead* eases into a predictable pattern that seems built from some kind of spiritual shorthand: Frank drinks from the oasis of humane concern, only to return to the streets for increasingly brutal episodes. Cage and Arquette do sensitive work together (they're a real-life couple) but I found myself wishing their characters started further apart; Frank and Mary are simpatico from their first encounter, anticipating each other's hurts and needs like siblings. It's all very supportive.

*Bringing Out the Dead* is appealingly verbal and often comes across like a Woody Allen comedy. The ambulance is Frank's harried skull and when the dispatcher's voice squeals through, it pleads for his attention before getting a response. (The smart-alecky voice is Scorsese's—shades of his unhinged back-seat passenger from *Taxi Driver*.) One emergency resuscitation becomes a holy-roller's revival when Frank's shift partner, Marcus (Ving Rhames with glinting eyes and a perpetual wink), sees an opportunity to save some souls: hands are joined, a sermon is delivered, the victim recovers, absurdly.



PHIL CARUSO

Nicolas Cage and Ving Rhames stage a revival.

It's this loopy surreal tone that works best, and while *Bringing Out the Dead* never succumbs to bathos, it could have used more irreverence. When Frank finally does explode (he's no Travis Bickle, but you knew it was coming), the film approaches an exhilarating mania: Scorsese's camera starts doing somersaults around the racing white streak of an ambulance, bottles are swigged, punk by the Clash hammers away on the soundtrack. It's a speedy, gonzo kind of filmmaking—like the last 20 adrenalized minutes of *GoodFellas*—that would have served all the ambulance scenes just as well, making Mary more crucial to Frank's sanity: a shield from hyperactivity and gore.

Instead, Scorsese is satisfied with disconnected details, like the brief glimpse of some drug vials furtively snatched from the pavement next to a dying dealer. Are we supposed to feel closer to a sleepless paramedic because his bookshelf happens to contain works by Shelley and Italo Calvino? "Just don't meditate on it," advises Marcus, calmly chomping on his cigar and grinning; *Bringing Out the Dead* has less to do with the condition of suffering than with the pain of caring too much. There's medicine for that too, the film seems to say, but Scorsese's is a tidy prescription: "Don't make me take off my sunglasses," yells one fed-up hospital guard. It's the truest line in a film as detachable as a band-aid. ■

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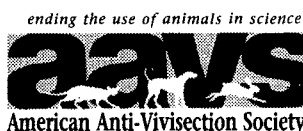
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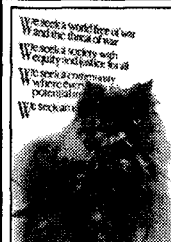
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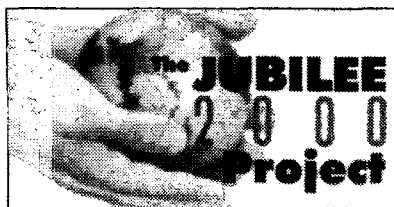
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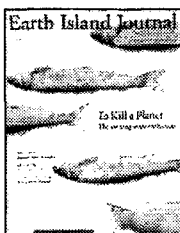


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**N**ora is 44 years old, a petite, wiry black woman prone to “rages” that always seem to get her into trouble. Her days at Woodhouse may, in fact, be numbered, because her violent outbursts frighten residents and staff alike. For as long as she can remember, this is how it has been. She calls her story, “Life with Father.”

“My father was working in a hospital as a janitor, which he hated. He was not very proud of that. When he used to come home from work, he was extremely angry and enraged. He used to tell about how people treated him on the job.

“My father was very, very fair skinned, coal-black straight hair and a very handsome guy. One day I asked my mother why did she marry him, because he seemed so mean. And she said, ‘Because I thought your father reminded me of Clark Gable.’ And she said, ‘What a mistake I made.’

“My mother was a registered nurse. She would come home and she was tired from 16 hours on the job. I felt a lot of compassion for my mother because she worked very hard. My father was having a lot of trouble because he got out of school in the fifth grade, so he was having a lot of trouble with himself and with the world.

“I have to say this also. I thought my mother had long hair, but she did not. She had her hair braided up under a wig, a red, long wig. My father had told me, ‘The reason why I married your mother is because when I first met her, I seen her and she looked like an orange something.’ Her skin was orange and her hair was red, so he right away drew to this woman. My father was very fair skinned. He didn’t want his kids to be dark. One of my brothers is dark and my father would always be on him about that. You know, you take all these little things, these details into consideration.

“All hell broke loose because my father started drinking, because of his job. He hated his job. He was not very proud of working as a janitor. He hated it because my mother was a nurse and he was a janitor. It was demeaning to him because he was a man. It made him feel bad. It didn’t make him feel he was the man of the house.

“My mother, on the other hand, was from a middle-class, upper-class family. I guess he felt that she was the stronger one. So he started drinking and he started becoming very mean.

“By the time I was 15, 16 years old, I was a loner, anti-social, which only made my feelings even worse. I felt alienated, I felt isolated. I was in bad shape mentally. By now I’m having feelings of rage and I didn’t know what to do with it. That’s when I turned to drinkin’ and druggin’.”

**T**he way I see it, Nora embodies race, gender and class in the United States. A poor black woman, she was not simply raised in a dysfunctional family, but is a child of America, where men are shamed if they are less educated than their wives, or if they work at the lowest rung of the social ladder. Years ago, sociologists Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, in *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, described men like Nora’s father as having “the feeling of not getting anywhere despite one’s efforts, the feeling of vulnerability in contrasting oneself to others at a higher social level, the buried sense of inadequacy that one resents oneself for feeling.”

Nora’s father could not escape these feelings, not even in his own home, where his wife served as a constant reminder of his inferiority because of her family background and her profession. His rage was only partially internalized, most of it was directed at his wife or children. The rest he swallowed with shots of whiskey.

Of course, being a black man in a white world made matters worse, even if he was “very fair-skinned, with straight black hair.” He was “drawn” to his wife-to-be by her “orange skin and red hair” which turned out to be false, and “got on” a son for being “dark.” Her father did not create society’s divisions, he learned them well and they became him.

As Nora advises, “Take all these little things, these details into consideration” and we can begin to understand her rage. Early on, Nora learned to swallow many indignities. But she wouldn’t be completely tamed, she protests in anger. Of course, when Nora displays her anger in controlled settings, it becomes another “thing” in her to be broken. No wonder drugs and alcohol play a part in these worlds of suffering. While our media and most “scientific” reports focus on the latest drug of choice (from alcohol to heroin to cocaine to crack to heroin to coke to alcohol), we are fed enormous doses of trivia, and human suffering still goes unnoticed.

That substance abuse is prevalent in our society is not surprising—only that it is not more prevalent. As I hear the words of those at Woodhouse who have been alcohol and street-drug abusers, pain and its counterpoison come together. Of crack, Nora says, “It’s pure pleasure, peace, contentment.” She seeks this antidote only after her pain has become unbearable. “Fragmentation and divisions of the self,” Sennett and Cobb observe, “are the arrangements consciousness makes in response to an environment where respect is not forthcoming as a matter of course.”

Nora and I are growing close. Even though our lives have been so different, we share something deeper, almost spiritual. She says, “You have anger, I have rage.” I agree and show her this quotation from Audre Lorde: “My anger has meant pain to me but it has also meant survival, and before I give it up I’m going to be sure that there is something at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity.” Neither of us has quite figured out what that something might be. ■

**Alisse Waterston** is an urban anthropologist. This article is adapted from her new book, *Love, Sorrow and Rage: Destitute Women in a Manhattan Residence*, published by Temple University Press.

# Home, Some Place

By Alisse Waterston



"COMADRES" by VIRGINIA SCHOFIELD

On my first day at Woodhouse, Nora wants to know, "Do you have your own home?"

"Yes," I answer. If homelessness represents collapse, "home" is its equally potent opposite. I have home, health, strength, goodness; she has homelessness, disease, collapse, evil.

"Do you think this is a shelter?"

"Well, no," I reply, "I understand this is a community residence."

"That's right," she asserts. "This is *my* home."

Woodhouse is a facility designed to provide housing and other services for the destitute in New York City. In this setting, women like Nora talk about what it is like to live on the street and how it feels to lose your mind, about the taste of crack cocaine and the sweetness of friendship. Their life stories unfold as I sit with them at a kitchen table, preparing meals, talking, sharing intimacies. They detail their collapse into homelessness, and share with each other that common experience.

Nora tells me what it was like for her on the street.

"Homeless people switch from Penn Station to Forty-second Street, Grand Central to the Port. Those are the main stations where we knew we possibly could go to the bathroom, could go get water, could get soap, could go wash up.

"At first, I found it so peaceful. I thought I could handle it, but eventually it got harder and harder and harder for me. It took about seven, eight months, then it started to get weary. I started to gettin' very weary, hopeless. I started to feel like I was just nobody, you know, your self-image and your self-esteem goes down when you're homeless. Life doesn't mean—your life

doesn't mean anything, doesn't haven't no meaning whatsoever, you know.

"A typical day was you get up in the morning, if I had the chance to sleep at night. Go in the ladies' bathroom. Then you find places where they gives meals. Then you run into people who don't smell good and you're mixed up with them and your clothes are dirty and then you really start to really feel hopeless, you really start to feel, 'This is it, man, this is it for you, you're gonna die,' you know, that's it.

"You're like this person with a backpack who's on a California somewhere, on a journey or somethin', or on a journey, you know, a journey, like that. Then, still in the midst of this, it just seems so hard because you're, you know, it's not like, I don't know, I can't explain it. You have to be homeless to really know what the mess people go through—'cause people who are not homeless, and people who are, it's not like how I'm talking. You're going nowhere. It's like you don't know what's up, what's going to be up next.

"At least when you have a home, you know, I'm a go out, gotcha key, put your key in the door, and I'm going, and I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that, and I'm comin' back. I'm gonna fix dinner, I'm gonna get the kids ready, and maybe I'm gonna take a shower and everything is set. When you're homeless nothing is set."

*Continued on page 37*